

# WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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## YOUNG WILD WEST'S DASH FOR LIFE!

### OR, A RIDE THAT SAVED A TOWN

*By AN OLD SCOUT.*



The roar of the mighty torrent as it swept through the gorge was terrific. Houses were swept away as if by magic. On dashed the noble sorrel. Young Wild West was going to save the town or die in the attempt.



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### CHAPTER I.

#### AN INTERRUPTED HOLD-UP.

"Git up, thar, you pesky critter! I don't intend to loaf here all day, not by a jugful. I think a mule is ther laziest an' most cantankerous critter what ever walked on legs. Git up, thar, or I'll begin to lam ther gad inter yer, gosh all hemlock if I don't!"

The speaker was a smooth-faced man of fifty. He was attired in a well-worn suit of cotton clothes and wore a rather broad, soft hat of black felt that was set jauntily on the side of his head.

He was mounted on a jaded animal, such as is known as a "calico horse," since its color was brown and white in irregular patches.

A few feet ahead of him was a pack mule pretty well loaded, and the man was trying to drive him just as though the mule was hitched to a wagon.

And this is the only way the animal could be forced to go, for the lone traveler had learned that as soon as he left Deadwood that morning, where he had purchased both horse and mule.

It was a warm day in the latter part of August and there was an unmistakable dryness about everything.

The month had nearly passed, and there had not been enough rainfall to keep the grass green.

It was near sunset and the traveler was trying to get to some convenient place to put up for the night.

He had been told when he set out from Deadwood that he

would strike a ranch before sunset where he could find accommodations for man and beast.

But the day had waned, and there was nothing that looked to him like a ranch, or anything else that was civilized.

Nothing but the same old, dreary, undulating trail, with the queer-shaped peaks and jagged rocks on either side, and now and then a yawning chasm to skirt with cautious tread.

"Jerusalem!" muttered the man, when he had got the mule started once more and was riding along at a jog in his queer tandem fashion. "Jerusalem! If I don't strike that ranch, or some other shanty putty soon I guess I'll have to camp out; an' I don't care about doin' that, as I ain't used to it."

The outfit kept on winding over the crooked mountain trail for half an hour longer, and then finding that there was nothing like a ranch yet in sight, the traveler called out:

"Whoa!"

The mule came to such a sudden halt that the horse ran into him with such force as to irritate the obstinate animal, and the result was that the long-eared steed's hind feet flew out and caught the horse on the breast.

With a whinny of pain the horse reared back on its haunches and the rider was thrown unceremoniously to the ground.

"Gosh all hemlock!" he cried, angrily, as he got upon his feet and made a leap forward to chastise the mule. "You onery critter, what do you mean, anyhow?"



"What's the trouble, stranger?"

The words came upon his ears so suddenly that the man dropped his whip and gazed in open-mouthed amazement in the direction they came from.

He saw a jaunty-looking man of medium size seated on the back of a big, powerful-looking horse. The man wore an amused smile on his dark, rather handsome face, and this, with the reckless air that hung about him, made him quite an interesting picture.

"Jerusalem! I'm real glad to meet you, my friend," retorted the traveler as soon as he could frame the words to make a reply. "You're ther first human bein' I've set eyes on since I left Deadwood this mornin' at nine o'clock. This is about the lonesomest road I ever traveled over, 'cept one down in Tennessee, which run through a gully where seventeen nigger ghosts was s'posed to come out every dark night. I'm right glad to meet yer, my friend, indeed I am."

"Well, it is mutual, then, for I must say that I am more than pleased to meet you. I am a traveler, too, and I always like company. What is your name, if I may ask, and where are you going?"

"My name are Stonewall Jackson Jimson, an' I'm headin' for some place where I kin strike it rich at diggin' out gold an sich stuff. What mought your name be, my friend?"

"Jay Redfern, at your service."

"An' whar be yer goin'?"

"Anywhere at all. You see, I am riding around these parts for my health."

"Fur yer health, hey? Well, that do seem a little curious."

"Well, I make my living by riding around, too, you know."

"Is that a fact?"

"Yes; that is a fact. And I make a pretty good living, too."

"How do yer do it, Mr. Redfern?" and the Southerner, for such he was, appeared to be very much interested.

"Well, I generally relieve every stranger I meet of what money and valuables he has about him. I am a road agent, my friend."

"You don't mean it!" ejaculated Stonewall Jackson Jimson.

"Oh, yes, I do," was the reply in a bland tone, and then the Southerner suddenly found himself staring at the muzzle of a revolver. "Just hand over what you've got, and be a little quick about it, for it is getting dark, and I have an appointment this evening at Diamond Hollow, and it is a good eight miles from here."

"Do yer mean what yer say, mister?" gasped Jimson.

"Yes, I mean it. Hurry up, now, or this shooter might take a notion to go off, and then I would have to go to the trouble of dismounting and making a search of your carcass."

"Well, now, this is too bad! I didn't take you for that sort of a man, mister. I've got to give you all I've got, hey?"

"Here! I don't want any fooling about this. Just hand

what money and valuables you have about you, and hurry up! Don't keep anything back, for I may take a notion to search you, and if I do, and find that you have not given me all, I will shoot you, as sure as my name is Jay Redfern!"

The Southerner no longer hesitated, but went down into his pockets.

"I ain't got so wery much money left," he said, with a rueful look. "I come putty close to spendin' my last dollar when I bought this horse an' mule. But I s'pose I've got to give it to yer, though. How about my watch—you ain't goin' to take that, too, are yer? It was one that belonged to my grandfather, an' I wouldn't much like to lose it."

"Let's see it?"

Jimson produced a silver bull's-eye watch of the old-time pattern and held it up for the road agent's inspection.

"That is a bull's-eye, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes; that's what it is. It——"

The man was interrupted, for Redfern suddenly turned the muzzle of his revolver upon the watch and shot it from his hand.

"If it's a bull's-eye, there's a bullet in it now," the road agent coolly remarked, as he allowed the muzzle of the still smoking weapon to cover his victim again.

Jimson's jaw dropped when he looked at the ruined time-piece.

"I reckon it ain't no good to anybody now!" he managed to blurt out.

"I should say not," was the laughing rejoinder. "But just hand over your money, and be sure that you give me every cent you have got. I want to keep that appointment I told you about, you know."

"Don't you give him a cent!"

As these startling words rang out close to them both men turned in surprise.

Standing before them was the erect form of a boy of nineteen or twenty, who had stepped out from behind a rock.

In either hand he held a shining revolver, and as the road agent's eyes rested upon one of them he saw that it covered his heart.

The newcomer was of medium height, and was built like an athlete. His face was remarkably handsome, and his flashing, dark eyes and wealth of chestnut hair that hung down upon his shoulders but added to his dashing appearance.

"Don't give him a cent!" repeated the boy in a voice that was as clear as a bell, and while he spoke coolly enough, there was an unmistakable meaning in his words.

"Well, I reckon I won't, since you say not to, young feller," Jimson exclaimed, recovering himself much quicker than did Redfern. "I'm sorry yer didn't show up afore ther feller shot my watch. I thought a good deal of that watch, an' now he's gone an' ruined it, gosh all hemlock if he ain't!"

But the dashing boy paid no attention to the remark.

He had his eagle eyes fixed on the road agent.

"You will please let that shooter fall from your hand,"



he remarked in a matter-of-fact tone. "If you don't I will drop it for you."

Redfern hesitated.

He had now recovered from his surprise, and he was looking at the intruder in an interesting way.

He did not seem to be the least bit frightened, and he was no doubt thinking of turning his revolver on the boy and dropping him before he could say or do anything further.

But that hesitation of his, which only took up the fraction of a second, was enough to make the handsome young fellow keep his word.

Crack!

The revolver dropped from the road agent's hand and he began shaking his arm as though he had received an electric shock.

"When I tell a man to do a thing I want him to do it right away," observed the boy. "I always keep my word. Now, if you choose, you can go on about your business; but if you want to stay here and insist on robbing this man, go ahead."

"I guess I will go, young fellow," was the quick reply, for the rascal had discovered that the bullet had merely grazed his hand and caused him to relinquish his grasp on his revolver. "I guess I will go. I am not such a fool as to not know when a fellow has the best of the game. But we may meet again."

"If we do you had better be careful how you act. I will give you that much warning."

The road agent started to turn his horse and leave the spot, but he stopped a moment, and then turning half round in the saddle, asked:

"May I ask to whom I am indebted for this interruption?"

"Certainly. My name is Young Wild West."

"Ah! Young Wild West, eh? Well, I will remember you. My name is Jay Redfern; you may have heard of me. Good-by till we meet again!"

The villain swung his horse around as quick as a flash and darted away through the rapidly gathering darkness.

"Come on, Charlie!" called out Young Wild West, for it surely was the young Prince of the Saddle, Champion Dead-shot of the West and wealthy mine owner who is so well known to the residents of Weston, South Dakota.

The next moment a tall, bearded man of thirty appeared leading two horses from behind the rocks, one of which was a handsome sorrel with a flowing mane and a tail that swept the ground.

This was Spitfire, the famous horse that had carried Young Wild West through more than one tight place in his encounters with Indians and renegade white men.

The tall man was Cheyenne Charlie, the well known scout and Indian fighter.

He was one of the partners in the mining business of Young Wild West, and he was the boy's close friend and companion in all his adventurous undertakings.

"I reckon you let that fellow off too easy, Wild," Cheyenne Charlie remarked, as he handed the bridle rein of the

sorrel to the boy. "I didn't like his way at all. I reckon he's what might be called a tough customer."

"You've got that right, my friend," spoke up the Southerner. "He is about the oiliest-tongued feller I've met in many a day. He's what might be called a very cool hand."

"Well," and Young Wild West smiled complacently, "I thought I would let him off this time. If he runs up against me again he has got to be very careful how he acts, though."

"He'll be for downin' you as soon as he sets eyes on you," the scout declared. "I could tell that by the way he talked. He ain't what might be called a coward, I kin tell you!"

"Well, I will be on the watch for him. Now, then, Mr. Stonewall Jackson Jimson, if you have no objections, you can ride along with us. We are going to the town of Diamond Hollow, which is not very far from here."

"Why, mister, how did you know my name?" queried the Southerner in surprise.

"Oh, we came along just as the road agent met you. We halted and took in everything that was going on. When the time came to save you from being robbed I simply dismounted and stepped up."

"Oh! That's how it is, is it?"

"Yes; that is just how it is. We took in all that happened from the time you fell from your horse till Jay Redfern, as he called himself, shot your watch from your hand."

"Well, I do wish you had showed yourself afore that had happened, 'cause I think more of that watch than I do of the little money I've got left."

"It can't be helped," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "If Wild had had any idea that the measley coyote was goin' to put a bullet in the watch, you kin bet he wouldn't have let him done it."

"I'm sure of that. Say, I forgot to thank you for what yer done fer me. Let me shake hands with yer, won't yer, Young Wild West?"

"Certainly, Mr. Jimson."

"An' yer friend, too, 'cause I kin see that he is one of the right kind of men. I thank yer both for helpin' me out, I do, as sure as my name is Stonewall Jackson Jimson."

"And you are welcome to all the assistance we gave you, or may be able to give you in the future. Now come on! I am getting hungry, and supper is waiting for us at the hotel in Diamond Hollow, I suppose."

"It is there if Jim got there all right an' was able to order it," the scout remarked, in answer to Young Wild West's words.

"I guess Jim got there all right. Get on your horse, Mr. Jimson."

The Southerner obeyed.

He was delighted to fall in company of two such fellows, and he forgot all about the loss of his grandfather's watch for the time being.

The mule was willing to go ahead this time, and a couple



of minutes later they were riding along through the darkness over the mountain trail that led to the mining town in the little valley below.

## CHAPTER II.

### ACCUSED OF BEING HORSE THIEVES.

Diamond Hollow was one of the prettiest little mining towns in the Black Hills.

It derived its name from the fact that it was a diamond-shaped hollow—really but a big break in a narrow gorge rather than split its way through the mountain.

A stream of water ran through it, and this was called Diamond Creek.

It was about an hour after sunset when Young Wild West, Cheyenne Charlie and Stonewall Jackson Jimson rode into the town and made their way for the leading public place that was called a hotel.

The neatness of its shanty houses was what gave the place such an attractive appearance; it seemed that an exceptionally tasty sort of people had settled there.

Though it was dark, our friends could not help noticing this.

"It isn't a very old town, either, is it?" Cheyenne Charlie remarked, as they rode along through the one street.

"Less than a year ago there was nothing here but wilderness, so I have heard," Young Wild West remarked.

"Well, I reckon they are a pretty neat sort of a crowd what lives here, by the looks of things."

"Yes, the town was founded by three brothers who struck it rich here and then brought their families to live with them. They built little cottages, and then almost everybody that came after them did the same. That is how it is that Diamond Hollow is such a pretty and neat place. There are no doubt some bad men here, for all that; if there are none, it will be the first town in the Hills that I have ever seen without them."

"Well, we heard the road agent, who called himself Jay Redfern, say that he had an appointment here to-night, so that means that there must certainly be some rascals livin' here, or else putty close by."

"That's right," spoke up the Southerner. "I guess we'll find all kinds here, ther same as in Deadwood, or anywhere else in ther West."

"That's right."

Wild was keeping his eyes open, and presently he saw a rather pretentious shanty with a sign across the top.

As it was the most brilliantly lighted of all the houses, he concluded that it was the hotel.

"I guess here's the place," he said, as he dismounted. "I don't know whether you want to stop at a hotel or not, Mr. Jimson; but I suppose you do, for to-night, anyway."

"Yes; I don't want to camp out to-night; I might do it to-morrer night, if I kin stake out a claim in that time an' rig up a place that'll be sorter comfortable. I've got enough

money left to pay for a couple of nights' lodgin's, though, if they don't charge too much. I've got about everything I'll need to go to work with in this here pack on ther mule, I guess. Ther things cost me enough—I know that."

The horses and the mule were tied, and then our hero led the way inside the hotel.

There were several men lounging about the door, but they paid very little attention to the newcomers.

They were used to seeing strangers arrive, since that had been happening right along during the past month or two.

There was no one in the barroom at all when the three entered, though the hum of voices came from a rear room, showing that there were not a few gathered there.

A respectable-looking man was behind the bar, and walking up to him, Young Wild West said:

"Is there a young fellow named Jim Dart stopping here?"

"There was," was the reply. "He got here yesterday, but about dark last night some one stole his horse an' he went out to hunt him up. We ain't seen him since."

Wild was surprised when he heard this.

"Did he engage board here?" he questioned.

"Yes; and he paid for two days in advance. We thought it mighty queer that he didn't come back."

"Is it a common thing for horses to be stolen around here?"

"Well, it happens once in awhile."

"Did he go alone to look for the thief?"

"Not exactly. He started ahead on a borrowed horse and three or four men went after him. They came back in a few hours, saying they couldn't find the horse thief, nor the fellow that had lost the horse. It is the opinion of pretty near everybody around here that it was a put-up job for the young fellow to steal the borrowed horse."

"That is the opinion, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, let me inform you that Jim Dart is no horse thief. If he is missing something has happened to him. I know him too well for that. He was to meet us here to-day, and the fact of his having disappeared from this place last night makes me think that something has happened to him."

"Who are you, if I may ask?" and the man looked at the boy keenly.

"I am Young Wild West."

"Ah!"

"What makes you say 'Ah!' in that way?"

"Well, you are the person who is supposed to have taken his horse away for a blind, so he could borrow another horse, and then get away with it."

Wild's eyes flashed.

"So that is the supposition, is it?" he cried, a tinge of anger that he could not control in his voice.

"Yes; but I don't say that I think so," said the bartender, evidently noting that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"Well," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, who was even more aroused than his young partner, "who is ther measley coyote



who dares to say that either Young Wild West or Jim Dart is a horse thief? Show him to me an' I'll make him 'polo-gize, or eat lead!"

"I say so!"

The words come from the doorway of the back room, and looking over, our friends saw Jay Redfern, the road agent, standing there, a revolver in either hand.

"Ther highwayman!" gasped the Southerner, who had not opened his mouth till now.

Then, as though it had been prearranged, a dozen men rushed into the barroom with drawn revolvers.

But Young Wild West never once flinched.

"Gentlemen," said he, in his cool and easy way of speaking, "there is some mistake here. I came to this town to do a little business of a private nature. One of my partners came on ahead from Deadwood, agreeing to meet us here to-day. His horse was stolen last night, so I am informed, and he rode away on a borrowed one, and has failed to show up. I am accused of being his confederate in working a scheme to steal that borrowed horse, and the man who openly accuses me stands in the doorway there. I am going to prove to you that it is all a mistake."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when he lowered his head and bounded forward like a shot.

Jay Redfern was less than ten feet from him when he made the move, and before the road agent could draw a bead upon him, Wild's head struck him full in the stomach and sent him to the floor with a crash.

Half a dozen men in the crowd made a move to rush upon the daring young Prince of the Saddle, and then Cheyenne Charlie let himself loose.

"Whoopee!" he yelled, waving his revolvers back and forth, so they covered the men all the time. "I reckon some one's goin' to eat lead in a minute. Haul in your horns, you measley coyotes, or some of you will never see another sunrise!"

The men paused and stood still in their tracks.

"Put away your shooters!" resumed Cheyenne Charlie. "This thing has got to be straightened up to ther satisfaction of all hands. When a measley robber of folks on ther road accuses Young Wild West of bein' a horse thief it is time somethin' was did. How are you making out, Wild?"

"I've got Mr. Jay Redfern, road agent and all-around villain, right here," was the quick reply.

This was, indeed, a fact.

When Young Wild West butted the man in the stomach so suddenly the wind was taken completely out of him as he went down.

And not heeding what was going on behind him, the boy followed up his advantage, and very quickly disarmed him.

He heard his partner's voice and knew there was trouble outside, but he made up his mind that if there was going to be anybody shot, Redfern would be one of them.

Out of the back room he came, forcing the road agent along in front of him at the point of a revolver.

Redfern had recovered from the effects of the blow he had received in the stomach pretty quick, and he was now

simply doing just what Young Wild West told him to do, because he knew he would be likely to drop if he refused.

"Gentlemen," cried Young Wild West, pushing his captive to the center of the room, regardless of the fact that there were nearly a dozen revolvers drawn, "this is the man who says I was the accomplice of Jim Dart in stealing a horse last night. Do any of you know him?"

"Yes, yes!" came from the lips of the miners. "He is Sam Brackett, the gambler."

"An' he's a robber, too!" cried Stonewall Jackson Jimson, in a loud voice. "He held me up about eight miles from here, an' after shootin' my watch out of my hand, was goin' to take every cent I had, but Young Wild West came along jist in time to take him down a peg an' make him turn tail to! His name ain't Sam Brackett; it's Jay Redfern, 'cause he said so himself."

"The man is mistaken," said the villain. "I never saw him before. Gentlemen, nearly all of you know that a young fellow came here yesterday afternoon, who said his name was Jim Dart. He also told the proprietor that he expected his friend and partner, Young Wild West, to join him here later. Then that night after dark some one comes along an' takes his horse, an' he borrows mine to go after it. He didn't come back, did he? Well, ain't that proof enough that his friend came along and took the horse, so he could get a chance to borrow one and get away with it? There is the evidence, and the only way to clear it up is for this Jim Dart to come back and give a good excuse for staying away so long."

At that moment the figure of a boy came hastily into the room.

"Here I am back!" came the startling words from the newcomer; "and I've got a good excuse for staying away so long. You are the cause of my staying away so long, you crafty villain, for you and your men captured me and kept me a prisoner in the cave till I managed to escape an hour ago. Gentlemen, that man is not only Sam Brackett, the gambler, but also Jay Redfern, the road agent!"

A hoarse murmur went up from the crowd in the barroom.

The accusation, coming, as it did, from two different parties, had considerable weight with the majority of the men.

But there were at least half a dozen of the villains there who were in league with Redfern, and seeing that the tide was going against him, they made a rush upon Young Wild West to liberate the road agent.

One of the more thoughtful ones of his crowd proceeded to shoot out the lights at the same time, and when darkness reigned in the place, no one offered to fire a shot, for fear of hitting a friend.

There was some great scuffling going on, and Wild lost his hold upon Redfern, in spite of anything he could do.

The next moment there was a rush for the door by everybody, it seemed.

But the young dead-shot was one of the last to get out, and when he did so, he heard the sound of galloping hoofs.

"Brackett's gone!" cried one of the miners. "That shows that what was said about him was right. Boys, if



he shows up around her ag'in we'll make it hot for him. We ain't got room for any one but honest men in Diamond Holler!"

New chimneys were quickly produced and the lamps in the bar of the hotel were lighted.

Then Young Wild West walked boldly inside, followed by Jim Dart, the new arrival, and Cheyenne Charlie, who still had his revolvers in his hand.

"Boys," said the man behind the bar, "I reckon as how we had oughter knowed better than to think them fellers was horse thieves. Three cheers for Young Wild West, I say!"

Every man in the place joined in the cheering.

### CHAPTER III.

#### 'TELLS ABOUT JAY REDFERN, ALIAS SAM BRACKETT.

Jay Redfern, alias Sam Brackett, the gambler, was certainly a bold villain.

He had been hanging around Diamond Hollow for over a month, and being affable and rather gentlemanly in his ways, he had made considerable money at gambling with the miners.

And during this time he had been secretly organizing a band of road agents, with which he hoped to make a fortune inside of a year.

He had just about completed the organization of the band when he had dropped into the Hollow House, which the hotel in the town was called, and met Jim Dart.

Jim was a strong, handsome boy of about the age of Young Wild West.

He was also an all-around Westerner in the true sense of the word.

He was an apt pupil of the young Prince of the Saddle, and could ride and shoot almost as well as he.

The three partners were bound for the town of Diamond Hollow for the purpose of investigating a claim that they had been asked to make a loan on.

The owner wanted to put in some machinery to better enable him to get out the pay dirt, and he had been recommended to Young Wild West as one who was worthy and honest.

Our hero and his partners were always ready and willing to put their money out in what they thought would be good investment, so they had taken the time to run over to Diamond Hollow and see how the land lay before they went into the scheme.

At Deadwood they came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to let Jim go ahead and find out all he could about the mine before they came.

He could do this easily enough, as the owner of the mine would not know him, and he could learn what he wanted to in a short time.

And that is just what Jim Dart had done.

He had been lucky enough to strike Bill Cottrell, who was the man who was negotiating for the loan, almost the minute he arrived in town.

It had not taken Jim long to find out that the claim was all right, and then he went to the hotel and paid his board for two days in advance and announced that Young Wild West was to meet him there the following day.

Sam Brackett, the gambler, had been in the place at the time, along with a couple of his men.

The scheming villain lacked just one horse to equip his band, and seeing that Dart was a stranger, and only a boy at that, he had set one of his followers to steal his horse.

And when this was accomplished he had offered Jim his own horse to go in pursuit of the thief.

Jim accepted the offer and rode out of town in the direction he judged the horse thief had taken.

It so happened that he caught up with the fellow, who was waiting on the trail about five miles outside of the town for his captain to come along.

Jim Dart recognized his horse before he got to him, and he at once called on him to halt.

But the road agent did not do this.

He started forward on a gallop, making straight for the cave the villainous band had selected for a headquarters.

Jim fired a couple of shots at him, but missed, owing to the darkness, and then pursued the fellow.

The chase lasted for several minutes.

Then, just as Jim found he was gaining on the horse thief, he was suddenly confronted by a dozen masked men, who covered him with their rifles and commanded him to halt.

There was nothing for him to do but to obey, as he was completely surrounded.

Then when they had disarmed him and made him a prisoner, they informed him that they were vigilantes and that the horse he had been riding belonged to one of their band.

"You are a horse thief," they told him, "and you will be tried and hung! That is the way we do business here."

So Jim was blindfolded and conducted to a cave that was connected with the one the road agent occupied as a headquarters, and the next afternoon, when the captain of the band showed up, he was tried and condemned to be hanged.

Of course Jim was not such a fool as to believe that the men were really vigilantes.

He had experienced too much of that sort of thing not to realize that they were outlaws.

He even told them, but that did him no good whatever.

Redfern wore a mask when he condemned the boy to death by hanging, and as Jim had only seen him once, he did not recognize him as the affable man who had loaned him his horse to go in search of the thief the night before.

The scoundrels had relieved him of his weapons and all the money he had, which was not a very large amount, as he never traveled with more than a hundred or so about him.

Redfern had ordered him to be placed back in the dark cave just before he went out on the trail to pay a visit to the mining town, where, he told his men, he would procure a rope that would do to hang the condemned horse thief with.

While Redfern was holding up the Southerner and while



Young Wild West was taming him down, Jim Dart lay in the dark cave, planning a way to make his escape.

He had hopes of slipping his bonds, and when he began to try he found that he could do it.

But it would take a little time.

Fortunately for him, he was entirely alone in the place, and this gave him a chance to work away unmolested.

In a few minutes from the time Redfern had taken his departure, the boy breathed a sigh of relief.

He had succeeded in freeing his hands.

After that it would be easy enough, he thought.

The men seemed to be rather careless, and with his experience as an Indian scout he ought to be able to steal away from them unobserved.

And he did do it, too.

He not only got away from the dark cave, but got possession of his own horse, too.

Jim wanted to get hold of the horse he had ridden there, but he could not take such chances.

It was too dark for him to find it readily.

It turned out that Jim Dart got back to the hotel just in time to hear Redfern say that the only way to clear it up would be for Jim Dart to come back and explain why he had remained away so long.

He could not have arrived in a better time.

But let us follow the road agent and his men who had aided him from escaping from Young Wild West.

They were all not a little alarmed at what had happened.

"I made a mistake," said Redfern, when they were well on the way to their retreat. "I should have worn a mask when I tackled that fool of a fellow with the mule."

"Yes," remarked one of the men, "but ain't it likely that this boy they call Young Wild West would have made you show your face afore he let you go that time?"

"I don't know about that. He had the drop on me, but I might have got away without letting him see my face."

"Well, I calculate that it won't be very safe for you to go to Diamon' Holler ag'in."

"Oh, I am going back there."

"You are?"

"Yes; but not for a day or two. When I do go back I will be rigged out so no one will know me. But never mind about that just now. The first thing for us to do is to change our quarters. That boy got away somehow, which shows what a fool I was not to silence him forever with a pistol or knife, instead of waiting for a rope. We will move our quarters to some other place right away."

"But where will we go?" asked one of the men, who was anxious to get rich as a road agent.

"Anywhere a mile or so from the cave. That boy will surely lead a gang there, you know, and he must not find us there."

"No; that wouldn't do."

Jay Redfern, alias Sam Brackett, was thinking pretty hard as he rode over the mountain trail.

His great ambition to become a successful terror of the road had been nipped a trifle right at the go-off.

But he did not intend to give it up.

Not by any means.

He did not intend to allow a couple of boys and a dark-whiskered scout scare him away from the place.

He would soon put an end to them.

That is the conclusion he came to when he arrived at the cave.

In a few minutes he had learned just how it was that Jim Dart had managed to escape.

The men he had left there in charge of the place were not aware that the boy had escaped.

Think of their surprise, then, when their captain rushed in upon them and took them to task for allowing the boy to get away.

He was so much angered that he felt like shooting some of them, but he curbed his temper and ordered them to mount at once, and to gather all their belongings before they did.

This they did quickly enough, and a few minutes later the captain was leading them through a ravine to a spot he thought would answer their purpose.

This place was a better one than the cave had been, only it was more than a mile from the regular trail that led to Deadwood.

It was a deep, natural cut in the face of a cliff in a very wild and picturesque part of the mountain range.

The entrance to the hole, as it might be properly termed, was entirely hidden from view by rank vegetation and hanging vines.

A never-ceasing stream trickled down the rocks from above, and it was the moisture that this gave to the ground that caused the vegetation to be so luxuriant in its growth at this particular spot.

Redfern had discovered it a few days before the opening of our story while chasing a wounded bear.

It was an ideal retreat to hold off an attacking party, because it could only be reached by a narrow path over which more than two horses could not walk abreast.

In fact, the captain of the newly organized band of road agents had no little trouble in locating the spot in the darkness, though he did so after awhile.

"I guess this will be a good place to make our headquarters, for awhile, anyway," he observed, as he led the way along the narrow defile and pushed aside the vines to allow his horse to pass through.

The men said nothing till they were well back in the cut.

Then, when one of them had lighted a lantern at the order of their leader, murmurs of approval went up from all hands.

"It would put yer in mind of a big pulpit in a church," said one.

"I reckon it would have to be a giant of a preacher to fill up a pulpit of this size," laughed another.

"Well, maybe it would; but it reminds me of one, just ther same."

The rascally band remained in the place that night without being disturbed.

The next morning Jay Redfern set out for Deadwood.

He had a double reason for going there.



The first was that he was paying attentions to the daughter of a wealthy mine owner there, and he wanted to call on her, and the second was that he wanted to purchase a disguise that would enable him to visit Diamond Hollow without his identity being discovered.

In Deadwood he also went by the name of Brackett.

He posed there as a gentlemanly sport, and was on the best of terms with the father of the girl he had been paying his attentions to.

Her name was Millie O'Connor, and though she had permitted him to pay her attentions, on account of her father, the girl really despised him.

Redfern had a hold on her father, of that the girl was certain.

She had been trying to find out what it was, but had been unable to do so.

When the smooth-tongued villain rode into Deadwood that afternoon he went straight to the O'Connor house.

As luck would have it, he found Millie reclining in a hammock reading a novel.

The O'Connors had one of the finest residences in the town, which was not saying much, for in those days things were not very elaborate in Deadwood.

The population was made up of the roughest sort of men, who had come there in search of the gold that was buried in the hills.

But still there were some refined and respectable people there.

The O'Connor family was supposed to be one of this class, and really, as far as the mother and daughter went, they were.

But the head of the house was not exactly what he represented himself to be.

He was about the same class of a man that Redfern was.

He had made a fortune by murdering his partner a few years before, but it had never leaked out, though Redfern knew it.

It was O'Connor's delight to spend the greater portion of his time at the gaming table.

That was how he became acquainted with Redfern.

Unlike Redfern, however, he strove to make it appear that he was naught but an upright, honest man.

He would never stoop so low as to go into a public place and gamble.

And the thought of leading a band of road agents to plundering the passengers of the stagecoach line that ran out of Deadwood would have caused the man to hold up his hands in horror.

But he was as bad as Redfern was, just the same.

Redfern saw the girl in the hammock as he approached the house, and he at once started his horse up the little drive on a sharp trot.

She was so engrossed in her novel that she did not take note of his coming until he was within a few feet of her.

Then she gave a little cry and got out of the hammock.

"Pleased to meet you, Millie," said the villain, speaking in his affable manner and bowing like a high-born lord.

A forced smile came upon the girl's face and she returned his salute.

While he stood there talking who should come out but her father.

"Ah, hello, Sam, old boy!" the father called out. "Glad to see you. Come in the house. Don't be talking love to Millie, because she don't like it. Ha, ha, ha!" and he laughed as though it was a great joke he had got off.

Redfern smiled softly to himself.

O'Connor had been drinking heavily, something that he seldom did.

He could tell by his speech and appearance.

As the man kept on insisting that he should come into the house, he did so.

Millie appeared to be relieved at this, though there was a look of uneasiness on her rather good-looking face as she realized that her father had been drinking.

She took her position in the hammock again, and finally forgot all about everything else but the story she was so much interested in.

Presently she heard footsteps, and looking up, saw her father and his guest approaching.

"Millie," said her parent in a very thick voice, "I've just given my consent for Sam to marry you. He wants the wedding to take place in a week. How about it?"

"How about it?" echoed the girl. "Why, I say no!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### REDFERN'S DARING SCHEME.

"Don't get her excited," spoke up Redfern. "It is too sudden, don't you see it is. Give Millie a chance to think it over. I am sure that she knows that I love her and equally positive that she returns it, to a certain extent, anyway."

"And I am certain that I do nothing of the kind!" retorted the girl with flashing eyes. "Father, in your present condition, I do not think you are accountable for what you say."

"What!" roared O'Connor, flying into a passion. "This from one I have raised in the lap of luxury! Millie, you shall become the wife of Sam Brackett just as soon as he wants the ceremony to take place. I want you to understand that he won you fair and square with the dice."

At this the girl became hysterical, and taking the drunken father by the sleeve, Redfern pulled him back to the house.

It so happened that Mrs. O'Connor was not at home.

The two men got into the library, and Redfern let O'Connor drop into a big arm-chair.

Then the younger villain helped himself to a drink from the bottle that sat on the table where they had left it when they went out.

"Millie don't want to have you, I guess," said the drunken host, staring at his guest in a maudlin way.



"It seems not," was the reply in a dry tone. "But that makes no difference, O'Connor. I have made up my mind that I am going to have her, and that is all there is about it!"

"Eh—what!" stammered O'Connor, rousing himself and glaring at the speaker.

"I am going to marry her right away, too," went on Redfern. "Dave Pinkham, the justice of the peace, will do the job, whether she wants it done or not, if you tell him to go ahead. I am going over to get him."

"No!" cried O'Connor, his eyes flashing. "I thought she was perfectly willing to have you when I, for the fun of the thing, threw dice with you to see whether you could have her or not. I intended you should marry her, anyway, and I expected you would reform and settle down. But if she don't want you I am not going to force her to have you."

"Have a care, O'Connor! You don't want to get a rope around your neck, do you? I'll——"

"No—no!" shrieked the man in a frightened voice. "Not that, Sam! Not that!"

"But I will, though, if you don't send after the justice of the peace at once."

"I can't! I won't!"

"All right, then. This will be the last of O'Connor, the wealthy and respected mine owner of Deadwood!"

The host sank back in a faint, and with a baleful gleam in his eyes, Redfern walked to the door and left the house by the way of the front door.

His horse was tied to a tree outside, and mounting, he rode off to the main street of the town.

The villain was as cool as a cucumber, and there was a smile on his face when he stopped at a low, tumble-down shanty that was right in the heart of the town.

"Second-hand clothes" was the sign that was over the door, but there were things beside clothing to be purchased there.

The proprietor, a speculative Hebrew, had an eye to business when he opened that place.

He sold almost everything that could be purchased elsewhere, and he made money at it.

It was here that Jay Redfern was going to buy a disguise, so he would be enabled to visit the town of Diamond Hollow with safety.

He found just what he wanted, and paid twenty-five dollars for the goods.

Then he repaired to a place where he was well acquainted, and going to a back room, wrote a note to Millie O'Connor, which read as follows:

"Your mother injured in railroad accident. Bring your father and come at once to the White Cloud Hotel."

"I guess that will fetch the pair of them," he muttered. "O'Connor was kind enough to give me the information that his wife was away from town and that she was expected to arrive on the train that gets here at seven to-night. I will just take charge of Miss Millie and take her to our retreat near Diamond Hollow. A few days there will be apt to bring her to her senses, I guess. I never cared so much

for the girl until now. I had an idea that she would readily consent to marry me."

It was quite a scheme that the villain had in his head. He never thought of it failing, which was evidence that he was not such a smart fellow, after all.

It might be easy enough to capture the girl and get her to the retreat in the mountains over thirty miles from Deadwood, but what then?

Jay Redfern never once asked himself the question.

He loitered around the saloon he had written the note in until the train came in that Mrs. O'Connor was supposed to be on.

Then he went out, and mounting his horse, rode toward the depot.

If she had really arrived on that train, he was going to tell her that her husband had been shot in a quarrel over some cards and was lying unconscious in a resort at the other end of town.

But she did not come, the train hands informed him, so he called a boy and dispatched him to the O'Connor house with the note he had written.

The White Cloud Hotel was situated well at the outskirts of the town where the road came in that the stage-coach line ran over from various other mining towns in the vicinity.

The scheming villain had chosen this particular place because he knew O'Connor and his daughter would take a short cut to get there, and in the gathering darkness it would be an easy matter for him to surprise them.

He knew that they would not stop to think that it was odd that the injured woman should be taken to the White Cloud Hotel, which was over a mile from the railroad track.

He was sufficiently acquainted with human nature to know that very few persons stop to think at all when such a message as he had sent was received by them.

He rode off to the spot he expected them to pass and sat on his horse behind a clump of trees waiting.

"By Jove!" he thought. "I guess I may as well put on my disguise. That will make it all the more real."

No sooner thought of than he was putting it into effect.

He had just donned a black wig with long, flowing black hair and a beard to match when he heard the rumbling of wheels.

"Here they come!" he muttered. "They are using the family carriage. I was in hopes they would come on horseback."

The next minute a carriage drawn by two horses came in sight.

In it were the forms of a male and a female.

Redfern gave a nod of satisfaction.

When they got pretty near him he rode out into the road and called to them to stop.

It was Millie O'Connor who was driving. Her father sat on the rear seat of the carriage, dazed and confused from the excitement and liquor he had imbibed that afternoon.

"Is this the O'Connor carriage?" the villain called out in a changed voice, as the girl reined in the team.

"Yes," came the reply.



"You are going to your mother, I suppose?"

"Yes. Tell me about her, won't you?"

"She is not so badly hurt as was thought at first. But I am sorry to inform you that through a mistake, she was sent off to Zig-Zag. You see, when she gave her name it sounded like Bonner, and they took her for the wife of Bonner, the mill man over there."

"Oh, oh!" cried the girl, while her father simply nodded and blinked like an owl.

This was a great hit Redfern had made.

It had come to him all at once.

There really was a family named Bonner in the little town of Zig-Zag, which was some fifteen miles away and nearly on the road that led into Diamond Hollow.

"I will conduct you to the injured lady; come on!"

Unhesitatingly Millie O'Connor turned the horses and followed the villain.

He rode along at the side of the wagon, making a remark now and then which only increased the anxiety of the girl.

But he managed to ease her mind every time she would ask a question, and that caused her to have more confidence in him.

So well did his scheme work that over fifteen miles toward Diamond Hollow had been covered before Millie began to grow anything like suspicious.

Then she asked him who he was.

For a reply Redfern pulled off his wig and false beard, and leveling his revolver at her father, exclaimed:

"I am your intended husband, my dear! Didn't my scheme work nicely. Don't you dare to move, O'Connor! If you do I won't hesitate to kill you!"

At this Millie O'Connor uttered a scream and fell fainting at the bottom of the carriage.

Jay Redfern had won the game.

## CHAPTER V.

### BALDY BATES LEARNS SOMETHING.

Young Wild West and his two partners, as well as Stonewall Jackson Jimson, had no difficulty in obtaining accommodations at the Hollow Hotel that night.

Opinion had been strongly against them but a short time before, but now they were looked upon in a different light.

The opportune arrival of Jim Dart had satisfied the miners that Sam Brackett, the gambler, was a villain, and that he was no longer to be trusted.

A couple of them had heard of Young Wild West, and these alone had believed what he said when he denied that he was a party to the stealing of a horse.

The proprietor of the place was profuse in his apologies and refused absolutely to take any money in advance from any of them.

He even wanted to give Jim Dart his money back, declaring that he never wanted any one's money before he

had given them the value for it, providing that he knew they were all right.

"Well, seeing that you have got it, you had better keep it," Jim answered with a laugh. "Besides you can't tell what might turn up. There might be some one to come along and say that I am worse than a horse thief, and then you would wish you had your money in advance."

"No, I wouldn't. I know you now."

Our friends slept well that night, in spite of what had happened.

The next morning they went over to the claim of Bill Cottrell and found him at work.

He was a very industrious man, and Wild was not long in arriving at the conclusion that Jim had.

Cottrell had discovered a pocket that ran straight down into the earth, and there was no telling but that his claim might pan out millions.

Our hero introduced himself as soon as the miner came up from the pit he had dug.

"So you 'are Young Wild West, hey?" he said. "I thought so when I first set eyes on you, but I wasn't exactly sure about it. An' you," turning to Jim, "are one of his friends, hey? No wonder you was lookin' around here so carefully ther day before yesterday."

"That's right," laughed Dart. "I came on ahead to see how the land lay."

"Well, Mr. Cottrell," spoke up Wild, "I guess the loan will be made to you all right. You will have to come over to Weston to have the business done and get your money, though."

"Well, I'll be only too glad to do that," was the reply. "There are men right here in town who might have let me have ther money, if I'd asked them for it. But I was afraid they would insist on goin' into partnership with me, an' I don't want that. So I heard that you was always lookin' to make a good investment, an' I says to myself, 'Bill, you had better see Young Wild West an' get him to let you have ther money. You kin have the papers fixed so that if it don't pan out right after ther machinery is put in that he takes ther whole business an' you git nothin.' That's what I says to myself, but I reckon that you won't have to take ther whole business if you let me have ther money. I know what's here, an' I could git rich in a couple of years by jist workin' away with a pick an' shovel. But I want to set ther pace for ther rest an' make things hum in Diamond Hollow; that's my idea."

Inside of an hour it was all arranged that the partners were jointly going to let Bill Cottrell have what money he needed to develop his mine, and that they were to take a mortgage on the claim and the new machinery that was to be placed there.

The papers were to be fixed up over in Weston, which was but forty miles away, the latter part of the week.

After another little talk it was decided that our friends would stay in Diamond Hollow till Friday, and then go over to Weston with Cottrell.

It was now Wednesday, so that would give them a chance



to look around the place a bit, and also try to find the gang that had kept Jim a prisoner so long.

The three left Cottrell to his work and started to walk back to the hotel, intending to get their horses and take a ride around.

They were about half-way back to the hotel when they saw Stonewall Jackson Jimson coming along with his horse and mule.

"Hello, Mr. Jimson," said Wild; "going to stake out a claim this morning?"

"Yes," was the answer. "I can't do it too quick, I guess, 'cause my money is putty low. They do have pesky high prices at that hotel, don't they?"

"Well, they charge about ther same rate as all the hotels in this part of the country. But speaking of staking out a claim, I think it would be a good idea to get as close to Bill Cottrell's as possible."

"Where is Bill Cottrell's claim? Say, I don't know nothin' about his business an' you do. I've come a good ways to make my fortune, an' I don't want to starve to death afore I make it. Won't you be kind enough to pick out a claim for me?"

"Certainly I will do that. But you must not blame me if it does not pan out right. Claims are like chances in a lottery; the prizes are not many, you know."

"I'll run my chances on anything you tell me you think is ther best," and the Southerner shook his head in an emphatic manner to show how earnest he was.

"We will take a walk back there," observed our hero to his partners.

So they turned around and went back to where Cottrell was working away at digging a shaft.

There was no one located to him on either side, so after they had told him all they knew about Jimson, Cottrell seemed to be perfectly willing to have him for a neighbor.

"There," observed Wild, turning to the Southerner, "you can take your choice of these claims here. I can't tell you which one would be apt to be the best."

"Thank you," was the reply. "I reckon I'll take ther off-sided one. There's a good place to build a shanty right there ag'in ther cliff."

"That's as good as any," remarked Cottrell. "I think my vein leans that way, an' if it does you're sure to strike it rich."

"Good enough! I hope I do make enough to buy my grub for a while, anyhow. I ain't lazy, I kin tell yer that! I'm willin' to work, all right."

Our three friends lingered a few minutes and saw that Cottrell was showing him how to measure out the claim and drive the stakes, and then they went back to the hotel.

As they neared the hotel they heard loud voices and bursts of laughter coming from the barroom.

Half a dozen horses were hitched outside, which showed that some new arrivals had come to town.

This was enough to cause the three to go in and see what was going on.

Wild led the way inside, and he had scarcely crossed the threshold when a big fellow with a matted sandy beard

seized him by the collar and flung him half-way across the room.

"Come right in, pilgrims! You're jest in time!" he cried; and then he made a grab for Jim, who dodged him, however, having seen what had occurred to Wild.

The fellow laughed good-naturedly, and though he was somewhat nettled at the reception that was given him, our hero said nothing.

The fellow looked at Charlie as he entered, and then stepped aside, saying:

"I won't shackle into you, stranger. It does youngsters good to shake 'em up a little once in awhile; that's why I sorter whirled ther boy with ther long hair in so sudden like. It is apt to learn him to be active, you know."

"Yes," said the scout, shrugging his shoulders, "I guess it is."

"Well, name ther pizen you're goin' to drink at my expense. I'm Baldy Bates from Sizzlin' Gulch! I eat rattlesnakes for breakfast, chew quartz for dinner and swaller men whole for supper. I'm a bad man to be crossed, so look out for me! I always warn ther residents when I strike a strange town. Whoop her up there, landlord!"

At this five more strangers, who were unquestionably the man's companions, let out a yell that made the bottles rattle on the shelves.

They were all dressed in suits of buckskin, corduroy and flannel, and looked as though they might have been working on a ranch.

"Come, come!" roared Baldy Bates, as he had introduced himself, "name yer particular kind of pizen, an' be quick about it. I've got ther money to pay for ther best there is in the house."

"A little liquor's mine," retorted Cheyenne Charlie, who did not want to be the cause of any row; for he knew well enough that a refusal to drink with the "bad man" meant that there would be a racket started right away.

And Charlie was pretty sure that there would be one, anyhow, for neither Wild nor Jim drank anything strong.

"Come, sonny," went on the rough fellow, seizing Jim by the arm and pulling him up to the bar. "You'll take a little liquor, too, I reckon."

Then he beckoned to Young Wild West, who promptly stepped up.

"I will take a cigar with you," he said, calmly.

"You'll what?"

"You asked me to have something, didn't you?" and Wild looked at him with affected innocence.

"Asked you to have something? Well, I calculate that I told you all to name your pizen."

"Well, I have named mine; I'll take a cigar."

"Oh!"

Baldy Bates smiled and then turned to Jim.

"I'll have a cigar, too," the boy said.

"Good enough! Landlord, give them boys each a cigar, an' hurry up about it."

The cigars were passed out to the two, and then the man poured out their drinks.



Wild had just lighted his cigar when the big man turned around suddenly and knocked it from his mouth.

He did the same thing to Jim with his other hand before the boy could prevent it.

"I've changed my mind about it, landlord. Jest give 'em a drink apiece, ther same as ther rest of us is drinkin'!"

Both Wild and Jim were very much angered at what had occurred.

Our hero quickly picked up his cigar and then threw it at the bad man.

It hit him in the face with the fire end, and with a yell he jumped back and upset a whiskey bottle that was on the bar.

"Singin' rattlesnakes! What hit me? Kin any one tell?"

"Here is the other cigar!" and with that Jim picked up his and let it go at him.

"Well, well!" gasped the five friends of Baldy Bates in unison.

The bad man knew what had happened all right, but it was something that was so unexpected to him that it fairly took his breath away when Wild threw the lighted cigar at him.

"Youngsters," he howled, as soon as he could recover his breath, "you have insulted Baldy Bates from Sizzlin' Gulch, an' I'm goin' to knock yer heads together till yer brains fly out! No one ever lived five minutes after insultin' me!"

He reached over to grab our hero first, and instead of getting out of the way Wild struck him a stinging blow across the mouth with the flat of his hand.

Then Jim did the same thing, and it is safe to say that the bad man saw a few stars that he never dreamed of being in existence.

"Don't no one interfere!" cried Cheyenne Charlie. "Ther first one what does will eat lead!"

He stood with his back to the wall, a shooter in either hand, and the look in his eye told that he meant business.

Every man in the room remained perfectly quiet except Baldy Bates.

He made a grab for his revolver, jumping toward Wild as he did so.

But Jim Dart was active enough to grab the shooter before his fingers got hold of it.

Then Wild gave him another sound slap and took the other revolver that was in his belt.

That left the bad man disarmed, save for the bowie he had in his belt.

He was now so enraged that he drew this and made a rush at Young Wild West.

Spat!

Our hero's fist caught him between the eyes and he tumbled over backward.

"You started the rumpus," Wild said. "Now you have got the worst of it. You thought you would have some fun with a couple of boys. You are nothing but a big, harmless bully, and either of us can settle you in any way you want to fight."

Baldy Bates sat on the floor and looked hard at the speaker.

"You mean that, I s'pose?" he ventured.

"Yes; I mean it. Now, if you take my advice you will get up and behave yourself. You are not half as bad a man as you think you are!"

"I ain't, hey?" and the surprised fellow got upon his feet. "I reckon I ain't as bad as I mought be, but I'm jest bad enough to stop people from insultin' me!"

"Insulting you? Why, no one has insulted you. I'll leave it to the crowd if they have."

"Come, Baldy!" spoke up one of his companions, "call it quits!"

"Not till I've give them two boys a wallopin'!" was the angry retort.

"Well, if you are bent on walloping us, you may as well have it out with me first," and with that Young Wild West darted forward, and catching the man unawares, threw him over his head.

He struck so heavily that the breath was knocked out of his body temporarily, and he lay there with his mouth open like a fish out of water.

"Why don't you wallop me?" Wild asked, tauntingly. "Get up! I want you to get through with me and then tackle my partner."

The surprised bad man gave a grunt as he caught his breath and then got upon his feet.

"I reckon I've got enough," he said, quietly. "I ain't exactly a hog, you know. Young feller, what mought yer name be?"

"Young Wild West."

"Young Wild West, hey? Well, I mought have known it. I've heerd of you, an' I'm very sorry I tackled yer."

It was remarkable to see how soon Baldy Bates got into a good humor.

"Give us all somethin', landlord," he said, in a voice that was quite mild. "Take what you want, boys; if you don't want to drink, smoke."

Everybody seemed to be in a good humor then, and when Wild treated all hands to the best cigars the house afforded, Baldy Bates took his hat and led in a cheer for the young Prince of the Saddle.

"My boy, I ain't as bad as I make out to be sometimes," he said, as he took Wild by the hand. "You learned me a putty good lesson jest a little while ago, an' I reckon I'll profit by it. I want you to know that I'm your friend from this time out."

"Thank you, Mr. Bates. I always appreciate a good friend, and I feel that you are sincere," was our hero's reply.

## CHAPTER VI.

### HOW A MAN PUSHED HIMSELF AHEAD.

Wild and his partners left the hotel a few minutes later and went to the stable and got their horses.

They were now going to take a ride around and see what was to be seen.



Of course they were more than anxious to locate the gang that had held Jim a prisoner.

Somehow, Young Wild West always felt it his duty to hunt down evil doers and lawless characters, no matter what town they happened to be in.

He felt that for the benefit of the residents of Diamond Hollow Jay Redfern, or Sam Brackett, as he called himself, should be driven away from the place or captured.

And as the villain had a grudge against him, Wild was only anxious to meet him.

They mounted and took a ride around the little town and were very much pleased with it.

It was a dry spell of weather just then, and the water in Diamond Creek was rather low.

"I'll bet that a heavy rain makes things hum through here," Cheyenne Charlie remarked, as he looked up toward the source of the creek.

"Yes; it is a good thing that there is a rise of about ten feet on either side of the creek," Wild answered. "The water must certainly get up pretty well when there is a freshet."

"It could not get up high enough to do much damage, though," Jim Dart observed, taking the scene in with a critical eye.

"There is a pretty falls two miles below, so they say," remarked Wild. "Let's go down and take a look at it."

Of course Charlie and Jim were perfectly willing to do this, so they rode off where the little valley narrowed into the gorge.

They were not long in reaching the place where the cataract was.

It was a very pretty spot.

The creek narrowed down to what might be called a split in the rock of about twelve feet in width, and gaining force from a descent of about fifty yards, went boiling and surging over a precipice to the rocks nearly a hundred feet below.

"My!" exclaimed Jim, as he looked around. "If a heavy rain was to come, and this narrow place above the falls got blocked up, I guess something would happen to the town then! The whole valley would be turned into a lake within an hour or two."

"That is a sure thing," agreed Wild. "But that is not likely to happen unless human hands did it, and I hardly think it possible that there would be men bad enough to drown a whole lot of women and children."

"Tain't likely," said Charlie, shaking his head.

But if the three could have only heard the chuckle that came from the lips of a man who was hiding behind a clump of rocks not far off, they might have thought such a thing was possible, after all.

Let us see who this particular man was, and what he was doing in that vicinity.

He was a shiftless fellow who had been hanging about the town for the past few months, and one of those who had joined Jay Redfern's band of road agents.

He bore the name of Godfrey, and though he was a lazy scoundrel, he was an ardent fisherman.

He had promised the members of the band that morning that he would go and catch them a mess of fish, and he was just nearing the spot where he proposed to fish when he saw Young Wild West and his two partners ride up and come to a halt.

Godfrey knew all about what had happened the night before in the barroom of the Hollow Hotel, as he had been present at the time.

He knew that his captain bore a grudge against the handsome youth with the fearless, dark eyes and flowing, chestnut hair, and it is more than likely if Wild had been alone he would have taken the chance to shoot him from ambush.

But there were three of them, and the villain knew better than to attempt such a thing.

He simply crouched down behind the rocks and listened to all they had to say.

The remarks they made about what would happen if the narrow gut above the falls should become blocked gave the fellow a brilliant idea.

"I'm goin' to tell Captain Jay about that," he muttered. "He might take a notion to wipe out ther town some day."

When our three friends finally went away from the place Godfrey started in at fishing, and when noon-time came he had a fine string.

Then he took a short cut and soon reached the rendezvous of the rascally gang.

The captain was away, having gone to Deadwood, as has been told, but there were eight of the men there in camp in the hidden hole, as some of them chose to call it.

A couple of the others had been out shooting game, and when they saw the string of fish come in the men were delighted.

The rascals were too lazy to work, and that made them think more about eating and drinking than anything else.

Godfrey said nothing about his idea of wiping out the picturesque little town of Diamond Hollow.

He wanted to wait till he got what he thought was a good opportunity to give his so-called idea to Redfern.

Four of the men had gone to the town, they knowing that no one was aware that they had joined a band to hold up the travelers that came from the town.

The rest, being known to be friends of the man known as Sam Brackett, the gambler, decided that it might be better if they remained away from there.

The day passed rather slowly to them, but they made the best of it playing cards and winning each other's money.

Redfern had left no particular one of them in charge when he went away, so as the evening wore on, and they began to get drowsy, it occurred to Godfrey that it would be a good idea to elect a man to be second in command.

The idea suited them pretty well, though two or three thought it would be better to let the captain appoint some one in that capacity.

Godfrey's suggestion prevailed, however, and when they took a vote a few minutes later, each of the nine present was picked out for lieutenant.



This seemed a little odd to them at first, but when they got to thinking over it, they laughed.

"We've all voted for ourselves, I reckon," said Godfrey. "Well, we'll try it ag'in. Ain't there some one here who ther rest think enough of to elect him? Bein' that I proposed ther thing, I won't vote this time."

This remark struck them pretty well, and when the next vote was taken there were four for Godfrey and four for a man named Sticker.

"A tie," remarked some one. "How is it goin' to be settled?"

"We'll have to wait till ther captain comes back," retorted Sticker, as he took a chew of tobacco with a confident air.

"Oh, no, we won't," spoke up Godfrey. "We kin settle it right here. I didn't vote, you know, so since it is a tie between us two, I reckon it will be ther proper thing for you not to vote, an' let ther rest vote over ag'in."

"I won't agree to that," snarled the man, who was just now in the humor to pick a quarrel.

"Well, I'll leave it to the rest. What do yer say, boys?"

"Godfrey is right!" they cried. "He didn't vote, an' you shouldn't, either, Sticker."

"He could have voted if he'd wanted ter, couldn't he?" the fellow demanded, bound to have it his way if it were possible.

"Yes, he could have voted," one of them admitted; "but as he didn't, an' there are two candidates, I think you ought to leave it to ther seven of us to settle it."

"I know a better way nor that," and Sticker put his hand on the butt of his revolver.

"You mean to fight it out, hey?" cried Godfrey, his eyes lighting with fire. "Well, we'll fight it out, if you want to; but not until ther seven men settle it first. I you ain't satisfied with ther way their vote turns out, we'll go outside an' blaze away at each other till one of us drops. I ain't no coward, Sticker!"

"I ain't, either, nor never was."

"All right. Now ther seven of yer kin take another vote, if yer want ter."

Godfrey's argument must have sounded all right to the villains, for this time when they voted he got five and Sticker two.

Sticker promptly flew into a rage.

"It's a put-up job," he declared. "Come on outside an' we'll fight it out."

"I'm yer persimmon, Sticker!"

The two promptly went out of the hiding place under the cliff, the rest following them to see the fight.

They walked on out of the passage till they got to a level spot, and then one of the men stepped up and said:

"Jest put your backs together right here, an' when I say ther word, step off ten paces in a straight line an' then turn an' let yourselves loose!"

This was fair enough and they promptly submitted to it.

They were placed back to back, and then the word was given.

With swift strides they started in opposite directions, and both made the ten paces in about the same time.

Sticker was the first to fire, however, but it was a pretty good distance, and dark; besides, his bullet flew wide of the mark.

Godfrey returned the shot, missing, also, and then the shots began sounding in rapid succession.

The result was that when they had exhausted the chambers of both their revolvers neither had been touched.

"Are yer satisfied?" asked Godfrey.

"No," was the reply. "We'll try it again, and make it five paces this time."

"I'm yer persimmon, Sticker!"

The rest of the men were for dropping it, but the principals would not listen to this.

Sticker was bent on dropping his rival, and he felt that he must do it this time.

And Godfrey was just as determined that he should not do it.

The same man who had acted before stepped up and placed them in position again.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes," came the reply from both.

"Then let her go."

This time Godfrey got the first shot in.

It took effect in the fleshy part of Sticker's right arm and he dropped his shooter with a howl of pain.

"I guess that settles it!" exclaimed the victor, with a chuckle. "I reckon I'm ther lieutenant of this crowd."

All the fight was taken out of Sticker, so they all filed back into the retreat.

His wound was dressed by one of the men who had voted for him and Godfrey at once began to show his authority.

He appointed two men to stand guard, and then, after giving a few minor orders, he went to his bed of leaves and turned in for the night.

It was long past midnight when Godfrey was aroused by hearing the sound of a woman's voice in the cave-like place.

He rubbed his eyes and sat up in a listening attitude.

"What could it mean?" he asked himself.

Then he heard it again.

But he heard the voice of the captain, also, and then it dawned upon him that Redfern must have brought a woman there.

And that was just what had taken place.

The villain had just reached the retreat with both Mil-lie O'Connor and her father.

"Well, Godfrey," said the captain, when he caught sight of him as he advanced through the dimly lighted place, "one of the boys has just told me that you were elected my lieutenant to-night."

"That's right, cap, if you don't object to it," was the reply.

"Oh, I don't object in the least. The chances are that I would have picked you for the place, anyhow. Now, just hustle a little and get a place fixed up for my guests. I have brought a gentleman and his daughter over from Dead-wood to stay with us for awhile."



## CHAPTER VII.

## SOME SHOOTING AT A MARK.

Young Wild West and his partners spent the balance of the day in taking in the vicinity of the town.

They searched the mountainside over pretty carefully, and though Jim managed to lead the way to the cave he had been imprisoned in, they could not find where the road agents were now located.

That evening Stonewall Jackson Jimson came over to the hotel and informed them that he had found a good-sized nugget at almost the first shovelful of dirt he threw out of his claim.

The Southerner was very much elated, and he insisted upon standing treat for the three he regarded as his best friends in town.

"I guess ther pesky claim is goin' to turn out all right," he said. "I showed the nugget to Cottrell, an' he 'lowed that it was worth about forty dollars. That ain't so bad for ther first day, is it?"

"No; that is not at all bad," replied Wild. "The chances are that you will strike a good thing there, and I hope you do. I'll take a cigar, since you insist on treating us."

Charlie and Jim did the same, and not wanting to be the only one to drink, Jimson followed suit.

The Southerner had rigged up a pretty good sort of a place to stop at, and in a few days he hoped to have a shanty erected.

"I won't work very much at gittin' out ther dust till I git a good, comfortable place to sleep," he said. "I don't like to sleep in ther open air much, though I've done lots of it in my day down South."

After he had taken his departure, our friends lingered around the bar and card room for awhile and then went to bed.

When they awoke in the morning it was raining hard.

There had been a long, dry spell in that section, but it seemed that the rain was going to pay up for it, as it came down in torrents.

"I reckon we'll have to stay right here an' make ourselves comfortable," said Charlie. "It strikes me that this storm is goin' to keep up for awhile."

"It looks that way," Wild retorted, as he went to the door and looked out. "My! but it won't be very long before the cataract we were looking at yesterday will be in sight."

"The water is getting higher in the creek already," remarked Jim. "I wonder if it will get up high enough to overflow the bank."

"It never has overflowed yet," spoke up the landlord, who overheard the remark. "But ther bridge below here was washed away last spring one day and folks couldn't cross ther creek for a whole day. After it stops rainin' it don't take a great while for ther water to go down, you know."

Toward noon the storm let up, but did not stop entirely.

Not being able to work out in the rain, many of the miners gathered at the hotel, and card games got to be the feature of the day.

It was about this time that two strangers arrived.

They were wet to the skin, and were apparently glad to find the shelter of the hostelry.

One of them was an elderly man, with iron-gray hair and mustache, and the other was a comparatively young man with long black hair and a beard of the same hue.

Young Wild West could not help noticing them particularly when they came in, since he was standing near the door at the time.

He saw at the first glance that the elderly man seemed to be in a sort of fear of the other, and this made the boy wonder what it meant.

The two walked up to the bar, not paying the least attention to the crowd of miners and guests of the hotel, and put away a couple of horns of whiskey apiece in short order.

Then our hero took note of the fact that the older man of the two seemed to feel better.

Baldy Bates, the bad man, was in the room at the time and having imbibed a little more than was good for him, he was beginning to get a trifle boisterous.

He made all sorts of remarks, some of which were real funny, and the crowd took it all good-naturedly.

Finally Bates got to bragging a little.

"I reckon I kin beat any one in the house at shootin' at a mark with a revolver," he declared. "I'll bet drinks that I kin pin ther five-spot of hearts to ther wall over there an' hit every spot in jest five shots."

"That is no feat," remarked the younger of the two strangers, as he squeezed the water from his long hair. "I'll bet I can hit ther five spot of the card while some one holds it up for me. If there is any one who has the nerve to hold a card to let me shoot at, I'll do it just for the fun of it."

No one made a reply to this, so he resumed:

"Well, I guess my friend will hold up the card for me. I don't want you to think that I am bragging, so I will do it, anyway. Colonel, you just hold up the card for me."

The elderly man hesitated, but an assuring nod caused him to consent to do it, and when Baldy produced the five-spot of hearts from the pack he had in his hands he took it and walked to the other side of the room.

There was not a man there who did not like to see good shooting.

The proprietor was very much interested, and when the man addressed as colonel walked over and held up the card he made no objection to having the shooting done in his house.

He held it high above his head, and by just the tip of one of the corners, showing that either he was not acquainted with his companion's skill in that line, or that he did not have any too much confidence in him.

The dark-bearded man drew his revolver and stepped to the other side of the room.

"Hold the card still, colonel," he said, and then raising his revolver, he took deliberate aim and fired.



One of the spots on the card was hit by the bullet, as all in the room could plainly see.

"That's one!" he exclaimed with an air of triumph. "My friend, I rather guess that you can't learn me anything about shooting—not much, anyway."

"Go on an' finish," retorted Baldy Bates, for the remark was addressed to him.

With a bland smile the fellow did so.

But this time he was not so lucky.

The bullet merely grazed the edge of the card on the side away from the head of the man who was holding it.

"He moved his hand just as I fired," said the marksman.

"I shouldn't have missed that."

"But yer did, jest ther same," laughed Bates.

"We will see if I do this time," was the calm rejoinder.

Wild had sized both men up pretty well now, and he came to the conclusion that the fellow who was doing the shooting was a pretty cool hand.

The other man seemed to be entirely controlled by him, and our hero wondered what their business in Diamond Hollow was.

The dark-haired man fired three more shots and hit a spot on the card at each shot.

He had hit four out of five.

"I don't call that very good shootin'," remarked Bates, when it was all over.

"Can you beat it?" the stranger asked.

"I reckon I kin."

"I'll bet you a hundred you can't."

"I'll go yer!"

Out came the money from both, and in less than a minute it was in the hands of the landlord.

Bates quickly produced another five-spot from the pack of cards.

"Who's goin' ter hold this fur me?" he asked, looking around the room.

No one made a reply.

The bad man was pretty well under the influence of liquor, and it would be taking chances to hold up a card for him to shoot at.

"If you don't get any one to hold the card I win the money," said the stranger, quietly. "You were to beat the score I made, and, of course, every one understands that the shooting is to be done in the same way I did it. Putting a card fast to the wall and shooting at it is different from shooting at a card a person is holding up for you. If you cannot get a man to hold up the card it is not my fault."

Bates was a little abashed at this remark.

He looked all around the room, and finally his eyes rested on the elderly man the marksman had called the colonel.

"Will you hold up ther card fur me?" he queried.

"No," was the quick reply. "I would not do it again for anybody. I was afraid I would have a finger shot off before. I won't risk it again."

The marksman smiled.

"I guess you are going to lose the bet, my friend," he observed.

Bates cast another anxious look around the room.

"Ain't there any one here who will hold up ther card fur me?" he asked. "I kin beat that feller's score, an' I knows it. I've got a hundred dollars up that I kin beat him, an' it don't seem right that I should lose it without takin' a shot at ther card. Who's goin' to hold ther card fur me?"

"I will!" exclaimed Young Wild West, stepping forward.

Wild had come to the conclusion that Bates knew how to shoot, and rather than see him lose his money without a chance to win, he was going to take the risk.

The dark stranger colored slightly when the handsome young Prince of the Saddle stepped forward.

But he forced a smile and nodded as though he was glad that Bates was going to get a chance.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart were a little surprised at Wild's accepting the invitation to hold the card, but they knew he would not do anything rash, and therefore must know what he was doing.

"Thank you, Young Wild West!" cried Baldy Bates, his eyes flashing with delight. "You are ther nerviest feller I ever met, an' you kin jest bet that your fingers ain't goin to git touched by any bullets of mine."

"I'll take my chances," was the retort, and taking the card, he stepped over to the corner of the room.

Wild held up the card as steady as though it had been pinned to the wall.

The bad man gave a nod of satisfaction, and then leveling his revolver, fired.

The bullet hit the spot nearest to the thumb and finger of Wild.

It was right in the center of the spot, too, and a murmur of surprise and admiration went up from the crowd, the majority of which sympathized with Bates.

"Go ahead," said our hero, calmly. "I guess you can hit the other four."

Bates did go ahead.

He shot four times in rapid succession, and hit every spot.

"I reckon I win ther money!" he cried, gleefully.

"Thank you very much, Young Wild West. Landlord, jest set 'em up for all hands."

The stranger took the card and examined it.

Then he told the landlord to pay the money to Bates, as he had won it.

"But," he added, "the card was held much steadier for him than it was for me. Young fellow, will you hold up the card, or another one, for me, so I can show that I can hit the five spots?"

"No," said Wild. "I merely held it up so that man could have a square deal. You made a bet and lost it, so there is no use in your running the risk of shooting a finger off some one's hand just to show how well you can shoot."

"You don't seem to have as much nerve as the big man intimidated a few minutes ago," was the sneering rejoinder.

"Oh, I guess I have nerve enough. But I don't intend to hold up a card for you to shoot at. To tell the truth, I don't think you are much of a shot, anyhow. If the gentleman I obliged will kindly hold up a card for me I will show you how to shoot."



"Yer kin bet your life I'll hold a card fur Young Wild West!" cried Bates. "Which card do you want?"

"Pick out one of the aces," retorted Wild, drawing one of his shooters from his belt.

A hush came over the crowd in the room.

They were more interested now than they had been since the subject of shooting at a mark came up.

Bates quickly took the ace of diamonds from the pack.

Then he walked boldly over to the corner, showing that he had the greatest of confidence in the boy.

He held the card up, face toward Wild.

"Don't hold it that way; hold the edge toward me."

As Young Wild West said this a cry of amazement went up.

"I am going to cut the card," he explained. "I am going to send a bullet through the center of the part where the ace is and make two pieces of it."

Baldy Bates looked at him for a moment and then held the card as he directed.

Crack!

So quickly did the young dead-shot fire that it seemed to the men that he could not have possibly taken aim.

But when the upper part of the card fell over and dropped to the floor a roar went up.

Never had the miners seen such shooting before.

Bates picked the piece of card from the floor and brought the two pieces over and laid them on the bar.

The landlord matched them together as well as he could and then disclosed the fact that the card had been cut through, the ace in the center having disappeared save for a speck at the top and bottom.

"Anybody who can't do that should not go around bragging and betting on how well they can shoot," said Wild, calmly.

"You're right they hadn't," replied Bates. "But when I gits a little liquor aboard I can't help braggin'; it's one of my many failin's."

The stranger said nothing.

But the expression on his face showed that he was a much surprised man.

But he appeared to take it all good-naturedly.

It rained hard all day long, and when night came the strangers were still there.

Wild went into the barroom after supper and found the two strangers there. He paid no attention to them, but walked toward the door.

"Your ain't goin' out, are you, young fellow?" spoke up the dark man, as he came over to the door.

"No; I guess I will stay inside until to-morrow, by the looks of the weather," was the reply.

"Well, what do you say if we have a game of draw? Your fine shooting has made me take an interest in you, and I imagine that you know something about playing cards, as well as shooting them. I am pretty good at the game, I am willing to admit."

Young Wild West thought a moment.

Then he decided to accept the stranger's invitation.

He was curious to learn what the man was driving at, for he felt that he had come there for a purpose.

"I will let you pick the players," the man said. "You will do me a favor by doing so, as I am a perfect stranger in these parts, and have seen enough of you to make me believe that you are as white as they make them."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE BREAKING UP OF THE GAME.

Wild led the way into the card room.

There was a vacant table there, and he promptly sat down to it.

"Since you have asked me to select the men to play with us," he said, "I would suggest that your friend take a hand, and that my two friends sit in the game with us. That will make five, and that is about right for a nice, friendly game of draw."

"That just suits me," retorted the stranger. "How about it, colonel?"

"I am satisfied," replied the elderly man, who had followed them into the room.

"Well, how about you, boys?" asked Wild, looking at Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart.

The scout was more than willing, since he really loved the game too much for his good sometimes; but Jim looked at Wild in astonishment.

Though he knew the game well enough, he was nothing of an expert at handling cards, and he could not imagine why Wild wanted him to play.

"I haven't much money to lose," he said. "I'd rather not play."

"Oh, sit down!" insisted the stranger. "It is only going to be a friendly game."

"And a strictly square one," added our hero.

"Certainly," and the man looked as though he felt injured. "If I thought any of you were card sharps I would not think of sitting down."

Young Wild West was looking at the elder man when this remark was made, and he noticed that there was a twinkle in his eyes.

He seemed to be interested in something, for the first time since he had come into the place.

After a little more ordinary talk the five sat down.

A pack of cards was brought to them by an employee of the place, and the dark-bearded man took it and began shuffling the cards.

"I suppose we ought to know one another," he observed, as he laid down the cards for them to cut for deal. "I am Dick Gregory, and this is a friend of mine and prospective father-in-law, Mr. O'Connor, of Deadwood."

The old man winced as this was said, something that Wild did not fail to notice.

"Glad to meet you, gentlemen," he said, with one of his calm smiles. "I am Young Wild West, and these are my



partners, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart. We hail from Weston."

Then they all shook hands, after which the cards were cut and the game started.

It happened that Wild won the deal, and though there was nothing in that when a square game was being played, it is always looked upon by gamblers as being a sort of omen of good luck.

Our hero was satisfied of one thing already, and that was that the two men were professional gamblers.

He was confident that they had come to Diamond Hollow for the purpose of making money at the game, but he could not help thinking that there was something back of that, too.

His keen judgment of human nature told him that, in spite of the friendly spirit Dick Gregory showed toward him, that he did not like him.

He tried to think where he had seen the fellow before, but could not do so.

The ante in the game was small, so small, in fact, that no one could have won or lost much in a whole day, if it was not raised.

Jim was certainly the poorest player of the five, but he seemed to have a lot of luck, for he began to win, and kept right on doing so for half an hour.

At the end of this time Gregory turned to Wild with a smile and said:

"It seems that the fellow who professes to be a green-horn knows more than we do about the game, after all."

"He is certainly having a great run of luck," replied the young dead-shot.

"Why can't we raise the ante a little? That would make it more interesting," suggested O'Connor.

As the reader has no doubt judged by this time, the man was no other than the father of Millie O'Connor, and Dick Gregory was Sam Brackett, the gambler, alias Jay Redfern, the road agent.

Redfern had managed to smooth things over with O'Connor after he brought him a prisoner to the retreat on the mountainside, and under threat and promise he had agreed that his daughter should become the villain's bride within a week.

When Redfern had proposed that they go to the town that morning and get into a game of poker, O'Connor was only too glad of the opportunity.

He had a mania for the game, and when he once got into it all thoughts of troubles and everything else but his present occupation left him entirely.

It was Redfern's plan to take back the preacher, who worked hard all the week with a pick and shovel and preached to all those who cared to hear him on Sundays, to the rendezvous when they went, and then by bribery and coercion, get him to perform the marriage ceremony.

He had not told the prospective father-in-law of this, but he meant to do it, just the same.

The villain's disguise was certainly a good one, otherwise he would have been recognized by those who had known him as Sam Brackett, the gambler.

Our friends had really seen so little of him that they could not be expected to recognize him in his present make-up.

Men with long black hair and beards were common in the West.

Redfern judged that Young Wild West had a goodly sum of money with him, and if he could manage to fleece him out of it he would be partly revenged for what the boy had done to him two or three days before.

He had arranged with O'Connor what they should do when they got into the game, and when the old man proposed that the ante be raised that was the first thing toward the fleecing part of the game.

They would keep on raising the ante, letting the others win the most of what went on the table until they got the stakes pretty high.

Then they would commence their "skinning" tactics.

Redfern had seen enough of Young Wild West to know enough to let him alone.

But he thought he would surely have him at gambling.

There was his mistake.

While our hero never gambled for the sake of making money, he knew the game from start to finish, as well as all the tricks of cheating.

He never played unless he had a purpose in view.

The purpose he had now was to find out what the two men were up to, more especially the younger of the two.

The game proceeded, our friends agreeing to the raising of the ante, and, as luck would have it, Jim kept on winning.

The disguised villain was losing the most, but he did not seem to mind it in the least.

He took pains several times to show that he had lots of money with him, acting very much like the character he was assuming—that of a reckless ranch owner out for a good time.

Young Wild West had no desire to win the money of any one, but he was willing to lose a little in order to satisfy his curiosity.

The game continued for a couple of hours, and at the end of that time the stakes were pretty high.

They were now playing a ten dollar ante and no limit.

Wild was watching the two men, and so was Cheyenne Charlie.

Jim began to lose right away when the no limit game started.

He was not used to what was termed "bluffing," and he only played the strength of his hand.

With Wild and Charlie it was different.

Twice they called a big bluff that O'Connor made and each time they cleaned the table.

The two rascals now began to work with different tactics.

Redfern could deal out the cards as he saw fit, almost.

And he could keep a few on his person without the ordinary observer being aware of it.

But Young Wild West was more than an ordinary observer, especially when he was of the opinion that he was dealing with professional gamblers.



While he did not appear to be doing so, he had his gaze on Redfern every time he handled the cards.

At length he saw him pick up the cards, after raking in a pot, and as he tossed them to O'Connor, who was the next to deal, he kept three of them in his hand.

So well did he conceal the cards that only an expert could have noticed the steal.

Wild said nothing, but watched and finally saw the gambler slip the stolen cards on the chair under him.

The hands were dealt around, and then Charlie made a ten-dollar bet.

Wild met it and raised it.

Then Jim did likewise.

Jim had a good hand, and he was going to play the worth of it.

"I'll go in," said Redfern, meeting what had been put on the board, but not raising it.

Charlie happened to have two kings in his hand, so he drew three cards.

He was agreeably surprised to see that he had drawn two more kings, though the expression on his face did not show anything.

Jim had three queens when he drew two cards, but he failed to improve the hand any.

Wild took five cards, as he had nothing, and had only gone in for a purpose.

He drew in the five a lonely pair of sevens.

But that made no difference to him.

It would have been all the same if he had not drawn a pair.

He was after Dick Gregory, as he called himself.

The three cards the villain had placed on the chair were aces.

He meant to ask for three cards and then change them for those he had concealed.

O'Connor was to see to it that he got the other ace when he dealt the cards.

And Redfern had it there in his hand.

He was so engrossed in making the change that would cheat our friends from the pot and win it for himself that he did not keep his eyes on Young Wild West just then.

"Give me three cards," he said, throwing down his discarded cards in a little pile on the table.

As he said this Wild dropped one of his cards on the floor, and he stooped to pick it just as Redfern leaned over for the cards O'Connor dealt from the pack.

In doing this he raised himself from the chair, and then our hero quickly took the cards from where he had hidden them.

It was done very quickly, and so well that the rascally gambler did not know it.

He was in no hurry to make the change, knowing he would have an opportunity when the betting got to going.

Every one made a raise until it came around to Jim.

He dropped out because he did not think three queens worth staying in on.

"Five hundred raise!" said Redfern, when it came to his turn.

He placed the money on the table and then looked at O'Connor.

"I'll see that and go you five hundred better. You can't bluff me out this time," was what the old man said, and he quickly put up the money.

Charlie thought his four kings were big enough to lift it another five hundred, so he promptly did so.

The look in Wild's eye told him that it would be safe for him to do so.

"I'll just meet that, because I haven't got much more than enough to do it with," remarked our hero, calmly.

"You call, then?" inquired Redfern.

"Yes," was the reply.

Then the gambler's hand slid toward the chair with the three cards he intended to exchange.

"I'll call, too," he said, as he slid the money into the pile.

Just then a blank look came upon the face of Redfern.

He had discovered that the cards had gone from the chair.

But he kept remarkably cool, and managed to drop a card on the floor, so he could have an excuse for getting down to pick it up.

When he found that the cards were really missing it occurred to him that he had been beaten at his own game.

But he was not going to let that big pile of money slip from him, if he could possibly help it.

"It is a misdeal!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "I have only got four cards."

"Is that so, my friend?" Young Wild West asked calmly. "Perhaps this ace will about fix your hand up. I found the three of them on your chair a couple of minutes ago."

The brow of the gambler turned as black as a thundercloud.

"Do you mean to say that I have been cheating?" he demanded, placing his hand upon his revolver.

"That is exactly what I mean," was the calm retort. "Just take your hand off that shooter, or I'll drop you!"

"Well, well!" gasped O'Connor. "What does this mean, gentlemen?"

"It means that you are a couple of crooks, and that your game won't work," retorted Wild. "Just every one of you lay your hands on the table, face up, and don't a man touch that money till I tell them to!"

Young Wild West stood erect now, with a revolver in either hand.

His attitude showed that he meant business.

The face of Redfern was now deathly pale, and as his lips began to twitch nervously Wild tumbled to the fact that his beard was a false one.

Then as quick as a flash he realized who the villain was.

It all came to him.

Redfern laid four cards on the table.

"Put the other one there!"

There was no mistaking the command, so the man did so.

All the hands were now on the table.

"The pot is yours, Charlie. Rake it in!"

The scout did not wait to be told twice.

"This is robbery!" cried Redfern, turning appealingly



to the men who had risen to their feet when the trouble began.

There were at least twenty in the room, and they were all interested in what was taking place at that particular table.

"Gentlemen," said Young Wild West, as calmly as though he was addressing a class of children at school, "that man is a rank cheat! He is also not what he represents himself to be. I will prove it to you," and with a quick move, he changed the revolver in his left hand to his right and seized the gambler by the beard.

Off it came, revealing the face of Jay Redfern.

A cry of surprise went up from the crowd, and then a dozen shots rang out and the room was in darkness.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PLOT TO DESTROY THE TOWN.

The shots had been fired by three of the road agent band, who were in the card room at the time.

They did not attempt to shoot Young Wild West or his friends, but merely tried to put out the lights, so their captain and his companion could have a chance to escape.

And they succeeded in doing just what they wanted to.

There was a window right behind where Redfern had been sitting, and while one of the men shut the door that led to the bar, another made for the window and flung it open.

Both Redfern and O'Connor knew what to do when they felt the rain and wind coming upon them.

They reached the window and fairly tumbled out of it.

There was a whole lot of scuffling in the room, and when some one struck a match a moment later Young Wild West found that the birds had flown.

The match went out almost instantly from the effects of the draught, but Wild had located the window, and he quickly made for it.

It so happened that one of the road agents made for it at the same time, and the result was that they collided.

As luck would have it, Wild got the worst of the bargain, for he fell against the wall and slipped to the floor.

When he got upon his feet the barroom door was open and a stream of light came into the room.

Knowing that the two men most likely made for the shed where they had left their horses, he rushed out, followed by Charlie and Jim.

But they were too late, for even then they heard the thud of departing hoofs.

"Let 'em go!" exclaimed the scout. "It is too nasty a night to saddle a horse an' go out. My! but ain't it rainin', though!"

Wild thought this a wise conclusion, so he went back.

The villains who had shot out the lights and made it so the two men could make their escape were not to be found.

While he was sorry that the road agent captain had not been captured, our hero smiled when he thought how nicely he had beaten him at his own game.

Charlie had come out away ahead in the game and Wild and Jim were about even.

But let us follow the two gamblers who were lucky enough to make their escape.

Shortly before darkness they had gone out to the shed and saddled their horses, as there had been a lull in the storm, and then it starting in right away again, they had changed their minds.

That made it all the better for them, as their horses were ready when they came out through the window.

Redfern was elated at making their escape, though he did not care much about O'Connor.

He could have got out of it all right if he had remained there.

When the two were well on the road up the mountain they heard horses coming behind them.

At first they thought they were being pursued, and Redfern called a halt and made ready to fight.

But just then the voice of one of his men called out:

"Hello, cap! Are you all right?"

"Yes," he answered. "So it is you fellows, eh?"

"Yes; two of us. Tom stayed there, 'cause none of 'em expected that he was in ther game."

The two came on up, and when O'Connor assured himself that they were really friends, he felt easier.

"They won't bother to chase us up to-night," said one of the men, "an' if they try it to-morrow they won't find our tracks, 'cause this heavy rain will wash 'em away."

"That's right," retorted Redfern. "This is the worst storm I have been out in in a long time. We will need a good drying out when we get to our headquarters."

They rode on, and in a little while they were at the snug retreat.

Redfern gave the signal they had agreed upon and the guard admitted them.

Back in the cave-like place a cheery fire was blazing, the smoke going up through a crevice in the rocks.

"Putty wet, ain't yer, cap?" Godfrey asked as he hustled about to make the villains comfortable.

"Yes, it is bad enough to have to be out in the rain on such a night, but to be driven out by a boy makes it all the worse."

"Who drove you out, cap?"

"Young Wild West."

"What!"

"Yes, he got the best of me again to-night. We were down at the Hollow Hotel all day and had all sorts of amusement; but when we got into a game of draw poker with Young Wild West and his partners just after dark we began to drift toward trouble."

"Ther youngster didn't find out who you was, did he?" asked Godfrey, as he listened with great attention.

"Yes, he found out who I was, and it was only by great luck that I got away."

"Why don't you git square on him, cap?"

"I mean to. I want to get square with him and all those who live in the town of Diamond Hollow. I don't dare to



go there any more, so why wouldn't I want to get square with them?"

"That's right, cap. I know a way that you could wipe out ther whole town at once, an' then come along afterwards an' pick up ther dust an' nuggets that's there."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Redfern.

"I mean jest what I say, cap. If it keeps on rainin' like this all night we kin fill ther holler with water twenty feet deep."

The captain gave a start.

He began to understand what Godfrey was driving at.

"You know ther narrer gut that let's ther water through ther gorge, cap?"

"Yes; I have been there several times."

"Well, if that was to be blocked up with somethin', how long would it be afore ther people in ther town would have to dig out for high ground?"

"Not long. But they would have time enough to escape and take their money and valuables with them. Since you have spoken of this, I know a better plan than yours."

"What is it, cap?"

"We could shut the water in the basin that is up above the gorge not very far from here. That could be done in a couple of hours' time."

"Then when the basin got pretty full we could let it go. I guess Diamond Hollow would be wiped out then! Why, as soon as a shanty or two got washed to the gut at the other end the water would rise and clean every one of them out."

"Right you are, cap. I never thought of that."

"I'll think it over, and if I can figure out how we are going to make a good haul by it, we will do it in the morning."

"Good enough!"

The two villains dropped the subject and went apart, Godfrey to his rough bunk and Redfern to the fire to finish drying his wet garments.

Neither of them seemed to think of the awful fate of the two hundred men, women and children in the town in case the flood should take place.

Such men, who could calmly plan to destroy so many lives, are not very often found; but there are some of them in the world, and it would be a blessing if they were out of it.

The next morning when Redfern arose it was raining as hard as ever.

He frowned when he thought of how Young Wild West had got the best of him, and then he began to think of what he had been talking over with his man Godfrey.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "I believe it would be a great thing! There is lots of wealth in that town, and we could surely get hold of the biggest part of it. Confound it all! the town shall be flooded, and this very day! If the people in it are fools enough to stay and get drowned when they see the flood coming, why, let them. Young Wild West must never leave that town alive! If he don't drown he will die, anyway!"

After having expressed himself this way, he went over

to the part of the cave that had been curtained off and allotted to the girl he had a prisoner.

A man was constantly on guard all the time, and of him Redfern learned that Millie O'Connor had not raved and made much noise during the night.

The girl's father was still asleep, so the villain did not wake him.

"When he gets up we will have a little talk with Millie," he muttered. "It is too bad that we had to leave the town in such a hurry last night; I meant to have brought a minister up here. Well, I will get one before the flood takes place, anyway."

He found Godfrey a minute or so later.

This scoundrel had become infatuated with the idea of flooding the town below, and it was evident that he would never be satisfied until the thing was done.

Redfern had a long talk with him, the result being that Godfrey took six men with him equipped with axes, picks and shovels.

They were going to build a dam to keep the water from flowing down into the gorge!

And then when enough had accumulated in the natural basin, they would let it down with a rush!

## CHAPTER X.

### YOUNG WILD WEST'S DASH FOR LIFE.

When Young Wild West got up the next morning and found that the storm had not abated in the least he gave up all thoughts of starting for Weston.

It was Friday morning, and that was the time he had agreed to accompany Bill Cottrell to Weston and arrange the loan for him.

But it was all out of the question to think of going away from the town that morning; there was no let up to the rain, and the way it kept coming down was almost fearful.

Wild stood at the window looking out when Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart came over to him.

"The banks of the creek must be overflowed," remarked the latter.

"Yes," was the reply; "I can see from here that the water is overflowing in some places. It must be a sight down at the falls now."

"I reckon it must be!" exclaimed the scout. "My! but jest s'pose that narrow gut above ther falls should git blocked up now!"

"The little valley would be turned into a lake," said our hero. "While the majority of the houses and shanties would be destroyed, the people would have no trouble in getting to a place of safety, since it would take several hours to fill the valley with water."

"Well, if it keeps on raining like this all day I guess some of the people will have to move out of their houses anyway," Jim observed with a shrug of his shoulders. "I shouldn't want to live in any of those houses over there close



to the creek. Why, if the water rises eight or ten inches more it will be even with the door-sills of some of them."

The three went down to their breakfast a few minutes later, and when they got there they found Stonewall Jackson Jimson there.

"I thought I'd better bunk here last night," he said. "It was rainin' too hard for me to leg it over to my claim. I went to bed rather early an' put in a good sleep. This are ther worst storm I've seen in many a day, an' there's no tellin' how long it are goin' to last. After breakfast I've got to go over my claim, rain or no rain. My horse an' mule have got to be fed."

The Southerner appeared to be more than satisfied with his claim, and Young Wild West was glad he was, since he had advised him to locate there.

After breakfast our friends went out into the barroom.

Though it was rather early, the place was pretty well filled with miners.

It was out of the question to think of working in that weather.

Baldy Bates, the bad man, was there among the rest.

He was on pretty good terms with all hands, and had lost considerable of the domineering spirit he had shown on his arrival at the town.

This was due to Young Wild West, and the man seemed to appreciate it, for when our friends entered the barroom he bade them a cheery good-morning, and insisted that they should have a cigar with him.

"I reckon me an' my pards won't stake out any claims till this storm is over," he said. "We've got enough money to stand us a few days, anyhow, I reckon. When are you goin' to leave town, Mr. West?"

"We intended to leave this morning, but I guess we will wait till it clears," was the reply. "So you intend to locate here in Diamond Hollow, then?"

"Yes; I reckon we might as well stop here as anywhere. It sorter strikes me that there must be plenty of pay dirt here; ther looks of ther people here shows that they have about what they want, I reckon."

"I guess it is as good as the average place," Wild said.

While they were talking a man came in with the startling intelligence that the water was lowering in the creek, though it was raining as hard as ever.

While this seemed strange to them, none of those in the room gave much thought to it except our hero.

He went out on the piazza with the rest and took a look at the creek.

One glance showed him that it was more than a foot lower than it had been before they ate their breakfast.

Even as they looked at it they could see that the water was gradually falling.

"I am going to take a ride," the boy suddenly said to his two partners.

"Where are you going?" they asked in surprise.

"I am going up the gorge to see what causes the water to be lowering in the creek here."

"We will go with you."

"No. There is no use in us all getting soaked to the skin

with the rain. I will go alone. I shan't be gone but a few minutes. I want to satisfy myself as to what causes the water to go down, when it ought to raise, if anything. It may be that a washout up on the mountain has turned the water another way, and if it has the people ought to be glad of it, for this little valley is liable to be wiped out some day."

Wild did not linger to make much preparations.

Without a word to any one as to where he was going, he left the house by the back way and made for the stable.

In a few minutes he had saddled and bridled his intelligent steed, Spitfire, which did not seem to mind it in the least when he was brought out in the drenching downpour.

Wild vaulted into the saddle and rode off up the gorge.

He noticed that the water was going down fast all the time.

A foreboding that something was wrong came over him as he rode along, and he urged his horse to a faster gait.

In a few minutes he reached a spot where there was a rather steep ascent.

A tiny stream of water trickled down from the heights above, but it was nothing like in size what it ought to have been, considering the amount of water that had fallen.

Our hero was now certain that the course of the water had become changed in some manner, and though he was wet to the skin, he was bent on learning just how this had happened.

Spitfire took him up the slope with comparative ease, and when he got to the top he was surprised to see a broad sheet of water there.

It was certainly a regular lake that lay before him, and Wild came to a halt and looked in wonder.

As his eyes wandered around he caught sight of several men standing near the spot where the water had been pouring down into the gorge with such force early that morning.

Then it flashed upon Young Wild West all of a sudden.

He knew what was the matter now.

The men had constructed a dam there to hold the water back, and it had quickly formed in a lake into the basin that was lying upon the tableland there.

But why had these men shut the water off?

That was the question that the boy asked himself.

They had not seen him yet, and he drew his horse back behind a point of rock so they could not, for it dawned upon him like a flash what their purpose was.

They meant to flood the town below.

That was as plain to Young Wild West as was the fact that it was raining.

He peered from behind the rock and saw that there were seven of the men, and as he looked sharply at them he felt certain that some of them belonged to the gang led by Jay Redfern.

They had picks and shovels, and stood there in the drenching rain as though waiting for something.

It did not take the daring boy long to imagine what they were waiting for.

They wanted the artificial lake to become completely



filled, and then they meant to break away the dam and let the mighty flood go down into the gorge!

It did not take our hero many seconds to form a plan of action.

At first he was going to ride up to the villains and put them to flight, or shoot them if they showed fight.

But he concluded that if he did that it would only be a question of a few minutes before the dam would give way, anyhow, and that meant that he had no time to lose.

He resolved to save the lives of the people in the town below.

Turning his horse in the direction he had come, he started down the descent as fast as he dared.

"I must save the town!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "I will save the lives of the people, and then see that those villains are punished afterward!"

Down he went, and presently his horse was upon the more level ground in the gorge.

Right ahead of the boy were two or three shanties.

Like a meteor he dashed up to them.

"Fly for your lives!" he cried. "Get to higher ground at once! A flood is coming down on you!"

The startled inmates lost no time in obeying. They evidently realized that the danger was coming from above, but they could not question their informer, as he was off like an arrow from a bow.

Wild had just passed the third shanty in the gorge when there came a roar from above that sounded like distant thunder.

The brave boy knew what had happened.

The villains above had caused the dam to give way.

Our hero's face paled slightly as he heard the ominous sound.

It was to be a dash for life now, and he knew it.

The flood was coming, and he must warn the inhabitants of the town to fly to safety.

The roar of the mighty torrent as it swept through the gorge was terrific.

Houses were swept away as if by magic.

On dashed the noble sorrel.

Young Wild West was going to save the town or die in the attempt.

On the left was a little house that was surely doomed.

Out of it came two men, a woman and some children, a little dog running ahead of them.

Wild could only wave to them to fly; he could not make himself heard now.

But they understood, and leaving the home that had sheltered them, they fled for higher ground through the falling rain.

But the town itself was yet ahead of him.

These few cottages that were going down before the mighty flood were but stray ones at the outskirts.

Spitfire seemed to be aware of the fact that it was a dash for life, for the noble animal required no urging.

He dashed onward like a streak of yellowish red through the sheet of falling rain.

But the mighty flood that was coming behind was gaining force all the time.

Once the thought came to Wild to turn and make for the high ground above.

He saw a chance to do it, but then he clenched his teeth hard together and muttered:

"No; it is my duty to save the lives of the people of the town. I must go on and run my chances. They will not know that the flood has occurred till it is too late."

His swift-footed steed was now gaining on the flood.

"Fly! Fly for your lives! A flood is coming!" he cried, as he came in sight of more houses.

The occupants heard the clatter of hoofs, and they came out in alarm.

Wild kept motioning with his hands for them to fly, and they lost no time in doing so, for they could hear the angry roaring of the flood in the distance.

There was no chance for him to slacken pace.

If he did the flood would surely get the best of him.

He felt that he had the advantage now, and he meant to keep it.

On he dashed, warning the people on the right and left.

Never had the gallant sorrel covered the ground as fast.

It was certainly Young Wild West's Dash for Life!

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE RIDE THAT SAVED A TOWN.

A crowd was gathered on the stoop of the Hollow Hotel, listening to an ominous roar that came from the upper part of the gorge.

Suddenly they caught sight of a swiftly approaching horseman.

"It's Young Wild West!" shouted Cheyenne Charlie. "See! he is motioning for everybody to run. Something's wrong, boys!"

The next moment our hero was near enough to call out to the men.

"Get to high ground!" he shouted. "Run for your lives! You haven't a second to spare!"

Then the brave boy dashed by, bound to save the town, if he could, or at least save the inhabitants, which amounted to the same thing.

Charlie and Jim quickly gathered their few belongings together and darted for the stable.

They got their horses in a twinkling and then rode for the spot Wild was heading for, taking up the cry of warning as they went.

The whole town was aroused now, and the frightened men, women and children were fleeing like sheep.

It was a dash of fully two miles Wild had made, and he had covered the distance in less than four minutes.

But his work was not yet done.

He knew that if the narrow gut above the falls was



blocked up there would not be a single building left to mark the spot where the town had stood.

That must be kept clear in some manner.

There was yet more than a mile to go to reach this place, and the flood was now gathering under the fierce pressure behind it.

The brave boy looked back and saw that his two partners were following him as fast as their steeds could carry them.

But they were the only ones. The rest of the population was making for the high ground.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart would go where Young Wild West led them, even if it was to certain death.

They were imbued with the opinion that the young Prince of the Saddle could never make a mistake.

It was a thrilling sight to see the daring boy riding along through the driving rain with that fierce rush of water gaining on him as he rode.

The houses and shanties near the banks of the creek were being swept away like corks in a mill race, and the boy felt that they would surely block the gut.

Two minutes more and he reached the claim where great improvements had been made.

The owner and his men were running away to save their lives, regardless of what they were leaving behind them.

The fleeing miners had been in the act of blowing up a portion of rock with nitro-glycerine, which was a comparatively new explosive in the Wild West in those days.

One of the men had a can of the stuff in his hands when the warning came, and unthinkingly he dropped it.

A loud explosion rang out, and he was blown to atoms.

As Young Wild West beheld this startling sight a sudden idea came to him.

There was plenty of nitro-glycerine in the little shanty close to the edge of the gut.

That would surely be washed away with the rest of the buildings that stood there, if the narrow place became blocked.

Wild had warned the last person now and he rode for higher ground, keeping an eye on the little shanty that he was certain contained the dangerous explosive.

He got upon a high level just above the crest of the falls and dismounted.

Half a minute later he was joined by Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart.

They were just in time, for the rapidly rising water had touched the heels of their horses as they rode up the ascent.

The rain ceased falling just then and the three could see farther and more clearly.

It was an awful sight they saw.

Fully a dozen houses and shanties were being whirled toward the falls.

The force of the current was all in the creek's channel, and though many of the buildings were well down in the water on the higher ground, they were not washed from their foundations as yet.

The buildings that were coming down with the flood crashed together and jostled each other as though it was a fight between them to see which should get there first.

One of the smaller ones won the race, and our friends held their breath when it struck the narrow gut.

There was a crashing, rending sound, and then the building ceased to move.

The others came against it with crushing force and went into fragments, but the little building only became wedged in all the tighter.

The debris riding against it accumulated as if by magic and then it was that the real danger to the town came.

Young Wild West was as calm as though he was simply looking at a play.

He was watching the little shanty that contained the explosive.

Suddenly he saw it break loose from its foundation and go eddying toward the debris at the mouth of the gut.

"Look out for an explosion now!" he shouted to his companions. "There is nitro-glycerine in that shanty!"

The next moment the shanty was whirled through a narrow channel and came to a stop right in the midst of the debris that was piling up higher and higher all the time.

"Boys," said Wild, "there was not shock enough to make the stuff explode. Let me see your rifle, Charlie."

The scout was the only one who had his rifle with him, and he promptly handed it over.

The distance was about two hundred yards, and Young Wild West was going to shoot at something he could not see.

He was certain that the explosive stuff was in that little shanty, and he was going to try and hit a can of it with a bullet.

He raised the rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. Crack!

That was all.

Again he fired with the same result.

But at the third shot there was a mighty roar and the air was filled with flying fragments, while a column of muddy water shot upward for many feet.

Some of the pieces of the wreckage fell close to the three on the hillside, and as Cheyenne Charlie dodged a falling splinter, he shouted:

"Hooray for Young Wild West! He's saved ther town!"

This was indeed the truth.

The terrific explosion had wrought a fearful havoc.

It had not only blown the wrecked buildings into pieces, but had torn a large portion of the earth and rock, as well, thus liberating the pent-up water and causing it to go dashing over the now broadened falls much the same as it rushes from an overturned barrel.

In the space of a single minute the water fell fully a foot.

It was a grand sight.

Never had our friends witnessed anything like it.

They remained there till the water had subsided to the creek, and then Wild said:

"Let us go back to the hotel. The sun is coming out. I guess the rain is over."

"It are over, for a fact," Charlie answered. "My! but this has been one of ther most excitin' times I ever put in. Wild, I never seen anything like it when you come tearin'



along like a streak of fire on that horse of yours. You jest made my heart jump right up in my throat, that's what you did! I've seen you ride fast before, but that beat 'em all. 'You was ridin' for your life!'

"Yes; and the lives of many more," said Jim. "If Wild had not taken it in his head to ride out in the rain and find out why it was that the water was going down in the creek many lives would have been lost. By the way, Wild, did you find out what caused the sudden flood? I never thought of asking you before. I was too excited."

"I found out," replied our hero. "I was too excited to think of telling you, I suppose. The flood was the work of half a dozen men. I saw them, but could not prevent them. I had to ride to give the people of the town warning."

"Half a dozen men done it, hey?" cried Cheyenne Charlie. "Do you know 'em, Wild?"

"I recognized a couple of them as belonging to the gang of outlaws Jay Redfern is the captain of."

"They have got to be settled with, I reckon," the scout remarked in an emphatic tone.

"Yes; we will hunt them up as soon as we find out about how much damage has been done to the town."

"Well, more'n half the houses seem to be standing."

"Yes; the ones to suffer the worst were those who lived near the upper end. The flood came out of the gorge so quickly that it wiped the houses away as though they had been mere paper boxes. I turned once in that great ride and saw a house looming right up behind me. It was coming along on the crest of a big tidal wave, and I don't know how Spitfire ever had enough speed to get away from it. Of course when the flood struck the main part of the town it broadened out and lost much of its force."

"But it had force enough to wreck many houses and ruin the furniture that was in them, for all that."

Our friends were the first to reach the Hollow Hotel.

It seemed that the miners were not sure but that there would be another rush of water, and they wanted to make sure that it was all over when they came down from the high ground on the side of the mountain.

But when they saw Young Wild West and his two partners ride calmly up to the building a cheer broke from them and down they came.

The hotel had been moved a foot or so, but that was all the real damage that had been done to the building.

Of course everything on the lower floor was soaked with the muddy water.

But it had not harmed the liquors kept there, and the majority of the men wanted something in that line to warm them up.

They thought they did, anyhow, though if they had left the stuff alone they would have been better off.

Young Wild West was the hero of the day.

Everybody wanted to shake hands with him, when they came back to the water-soaked town.

Some of them picked him up bodily and paraded around the place with him.

The women and children smiled through their tears when

they saw him, for they remembered how he came dashing through the little valley, warning them to fly for their lives.

The sun was now shining brightly, and this cheered the people who had lost much by the flood.

The work of straightening things out began in earnest.

When noon came Wild learned that only one person had been killed.

And this was the unfortunate fellow who had dropped the can of nitro-glycerine in his mad desire to reach a place of safety.

"Well," said Wild, "the poor fellow gave me an idea what to do when he unintentionally destroyed his own life. He let me know that there was more of the explosive about, and I set it off with a bullet when the proper time came. It is all right. One man lost and the town saved. Be thankful that it is no worse."

They certainly were a thankful lot of people, and they were all united in giving Young Wild West the credit of saving the town.

Our hero certainly had done this, and now he wanted to find the scoundrels who had been so heartless as to commit such an act.

"I shan't leave the town till I hunt down the men who dammed the water up and then let it down the gorge in a flood," he said. "Come, Charlie and Jim! I guess we three can do the business. I feel it in my bones that we can. We will let the others stay here and work away to restore things to their proper shape. We must find out where Jay Redfern hangs out, and then we will have the whole thing."

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONCLUSION.

Redfern and O'Connor sat at an improvised table in the rendezvous of the band that had been organized for the purpose of holding up the travelers that came along the roads to and from Diamond Hollow.

It was about the time that the villains had caused the flood to start upon the town below, and though he knew the consequences of such an act, Redfern smoked his cigar as calmly as though he was in a poker game that was more for friendship's sake than anything else.

O'Connor was very nervous, though.

Not on account of the proposed destruction of the town—for he knew nothing of the plot—but because his daughter was in the place against her will.

The two had been speaking of the proposed marriage and a speedy return to Deadwood.

O'Connor was in the power of his companion in villainy, and he knew not how to get out of it.

Therefore he felt that he must give in to him.

"I tell you, O'Connor," Redfern was saying, "there is only one way to settle this business, as I said before."



"Well, I am sure I would like to settle it fast enough, but what are we going to do about it when Millie objects?"

"Well, I'll tell you what we will do about it. We will go to her now and I will tell her all about how you killed——"

"No, no!"

"But I say yes! In order to save you from the scaffold she will surely consent to marry me. Then, when that happens, everything will go along nice and smooth, and in a few months she will be as happy as can be."

"But I don't want her to know that I ever——"

"You don't want her to know that you ever committed murder, eh? Well, just make up your mind she is going to know it, and right away, too. It is the only way that I can bring the marriage about—I am satisfied on that."

The villain got up and knocked the ashes from his cigar.

"Come, O'Connor," he added. "It is now or never!"

Mechanically the man obeyed him.

His face was as white as a sheet as he walked across the cave-like place to a curtain of skins that had been drawn across the quarters where the girl was held a prisoner.

There was a smile on the countenance of the road agent captain that was both anxious and triumphant.

He felt that he had won the prize, but——

He motioned the man who was on guard to step aside, and then lifting up the curtain, took O'Connor by the shoulder and pushed him inside.

Tied with a stout buckskin thong to a stake driven in the ground was Millie O'Connor.

Her face was very pale, but she still had some of her composure left.

"Father, what does all this mean?" she asked, reproachfully.

The old man shook his head.

"It means," said Redfern, stepping forward, "that I have the power to send your father to the gallows. He is a murderer, and that is why you have been brought up in the lap of luxury. He is a worse man than I am, Millie, and there is a chance for us both to reform. You can say whether the past shall be buried or not, for it all lies with you. Is that not so, O'Connor?"

"It is the truth, Millie," her father answered huskily.

The girl was on the verge of fainting, but by a great effort she mastered herself.

Turning to Redfern, she exclaimed:

"I know the conditions, so there is no need of telling me now. Leave me with my father for a few minutes, and when he has answered some questions for me I will give my answer."

"Very well," and bowing politely the villainous outlaw left the alcove.

He walked out to the entrance of the retreat, and looking out, saw that it was clearing off.

The heavy rainfall was coming to an end.

While he stood there finishing his cigar Godfrey and the men he had taken with him to flood the town showed up.

"It's done, cap!" said the lieutenant, smiling as though he had accomplished something that was much to his credit.

The captain shrugged his shoulders uneasily.

"Do you mean to say that the town is wiped out?" he questioned.

"Yes, cap; if ever there was a town wiped out it is Diamond Holler. I never seen sich a thing in my life; an' it was so easy to do, too!"

"And Young Wild West went with it?"

"That's a sure thing. Ther last we seen of him he was ridin' along ahead of ther tidal wave, tryin to warn ther people of their danger. But he was too late, an' we seen a house go sailin' along an' catch him. Him an' his horse went under like as if they had been a couple of stones."

From where the villains had stood it looked as though Wild had really perished.

Godfrey was sure that he had, and that is why he felt so happy over it.

But he had failed to see anything farther, as the tidal wave went sweeping around a bend.

"Well," said the captain, "I suppose it would be a good idea for some of us to take a trip down this afternoon and see how things look there. The survivors of the flood will surely not bother with me now. They will not recognize me as anything but a man who is desirous of helping them all he can. If you are sure Young Wild West went down in the flood there will be no danger for us all to go there."

"I'm sure, cap."

"Well, after dinner we will go."

"All right," and Godfrey chuckled as he thought of the booty they would be apt to find in the ruined town.

It was more than an hour before O'Connor came out from the alcove where he had been interviewing his daughter.

"It is all right," he said to Redfern. "She has agreed to marry you as soon as we get back to Deadwood. The past is to be buried and we will all begin life anew."

"I am glad Millie is willing, for I dearly love her, and I will make her a good husband," replied the road agent, as though he really meant it.

"When will you be ready to start for Deadwood?"

"As soon as I have paid a visit to the town below. My men tell me it has been destroyed by a flood."



"Is that so?"

"So they tell me. Nearly every soul drowned, I guess."

"And Young Wild West was there?"

"Yes; and he was one of the first to lose his life. Godfrey saw him and his horse go down. He was riding to warn the inhabitants to fly to a place of safety."

"I suppose I can go with you to look at the ruined town?"

"Yes; I guess it will be safe to take you along."

Redfern then went and had a short talk with the girl.

He caused her to be released from the thong, and then told her just how things were.

He told her he was going to reform and live an honest life, and promised her great things.

But she showed plainly that she detested him, though she said nothing.

The girl was trying hard to resign herself to a fate that made her shudder when she thought of it.

But deep in her heart there was a hope that kept her up, and on that hope she relied.

It was a little after the hour of noon that Redfern, the man Godfrey, O'Connor and his daughter and three of the band set out to pay a visit to the ruined town.

The girl had insisted on going, and when she urged, Redfern could not say no.

She had promised to keep secret all that had passed since he had kidnapped her, and he felt that in order to win her love it would be a good idea to humor her.

The party was mounted, and they rode along at a pretty fast pace.

All were eager to see what damage the flood had done, more especially the scoundrel Godfrey.

They had covered perhaps half the distance when they came face to face with three horsemen as they rounded a bend.

Then it was that Jay Redfern uttered an oath and drew his revolver.

The three horsemen were no others than Young Wild West and his partners.

They were as much surprised to meet the villainous crowd as Redfern and his gang were.

Our friends had no idea that the men would think of coming to the town that day.

And when they saw a young lady with them they could not understand it.

But they were soon to learn all about it, for when Redfern drew his revolver he fired a shot at Young Wild West without a word of warning.

The bullet grazed our hero's shoulder and caused him to reel in the saddle.

Then out came his own shooter as quick as a flash.

There was a sharp crack before Redfern could fire again, and the scoundrel fell over and slipped from the saddle.

Young Wild West had not missed.

By this time Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart had the rest of the gang pretty well covered.

They had revolvers in each of their hands and were moving them back and forth so they covered all hands, including the girl.

"Hands up!" cried Young Wild West in a ringing tone.

"The first man who makes a move to shoot will drop dead!"

In spite of this command Godfrey raised his revolver.

Two shots rang out as one and Godfrey and O'Connor dropped from their horses.

Charlie and Jim had fired at the same time, and O'Connor, being almost directly behind Godfrey, had received one of the bullets in his breast.

The rest of the men held up their hands and cried for quarter, while the girl dismounted and fell weeping on the body of her father.

Though he was not dead yet, he would be in a few minutes and would never speak again.

After the three remaining men had been securely bound and relieved of their weapons, Wild turned his attention to Millie O'Connor.

She was just in the humor to tell her story, and she did so, not omitting a single word.

"Well," our hero assured her, "don't worry any more than you can help. We will see you safely to your home in Deadwood."

"Thank you!" she cried, tearfully. "You are the first real friend I have met since I parted from my mother the other day."

"We had better take her and her prisoners down to the hotel, hadn't we?" Charlie asked.

"Yes. Then we will fetch one of the rascals back with us and make him show us where the rest of the gang is."

"That's it!" exclaimed Jim.

"But my poor father!" cried Millie.

"There is an undertaker who will attend to the case," answered Wild. "He was at the hotel when we left."

In little less than an hour they reached the Hollow Hotel.

The girl was at once placed in charge of the hotel keeper's wife, and then Young Wild West got ready to go back after the rest of the outlaws.

Stonewall Jackson Jimson and Baldy Bates pleaded so hard to accompany them that he gave his consent.

"I jest want to hunt out sich fellers as would drown out a whole lot of innocent people," Baldy said. "If they put



up a fight I'll be delighted to shoot 'em down as though they was prairie dogs."

One of the three prisoners agreed to show where the hang-out was, and then they gave him a horse and set out.

In due time they struck the close vicinity of the hidden retreat.

"Call your gang out," said Wild in a whisper to the man.

"Come out, boys!" exclaimed the outlaw in a loud tone. "You are wanted right away."

Probably he would not have said this so quickly if a revolver had not been pressed against his temple.

The villains came out in a hurry and were made prisoners before they knew it.

Only one fellow offered to show fight, and Baldy Bates shot him.

The rest were taken to Diamond Hollow, where they were tried that same day for turning the flood upon the town.

Every man of them was hanged at sunset, and that put an end to the road agents, who had expected to do such great work in that section.

The next day Young Wild West and his partners set out to conduct Millie O'Connor to her home in Deadwood.

The body of her father was to be brought over in the stage.

Redfern, alias Sam Brackett, was buried where he fell; as was his man Godfrey.

Millie O'Connor had escaped marrying a scoundrel, but she had a secret in her heart that would worry her as long as she lived.

But the town of Diamond Hollow had been saved by Young Wild West's Dash for Life, so we will write

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST'S BIG PAN-OUT; OR, THE BATTLE FOR A SILVER MINE," which will be the next number (41) of "Wild West Weekly."

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